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A Study of Policy Implementation in Preschools in Jiangxi Province:

Perspectives of Chinese Early Years Practitioners and Parents

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the implementation of early years education policy in China. It critically examines how current policy is planned and then translated into daily practice in kindergartens. The Chinese pre-school educational system is shifting its emphasis on academic achievement to broader principles of developmentally appropriate models of early childhood education. Consequently, practitioners and parents are experiencing challenges and issues brought about by such change.

The examination of early years education policy implementation, in line with modern values and traditional cultural constructions of childhood, is studied through a multiple case study approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Documentary analysis was firstly conducted to build up background information. Subsequently, data were further collected through a questionnaire survey sent to participants from a sample of four kindergartens representing public and private provision in Jiangxi province. Moreover, 24 in-site observations with 12 teachers and nine semi-structured interviews with three head teachers, three teachers, and three parents were carried out to gather in-depth data for scrutiny.

The findings reveal that national early years education policy is incorporated differentially in daily practice according to settings. The centralised policy-making style is problematic, as it ignores diversity across provinces and the private and the public settings. It is also suggested that teachers' traditional cultural values affect their beliefs and behaviours towards understanding new policy of child education. The lack of standards for teachers' in-service training results in different quality of practice across settings. Such practical difficulties are not acknowledged due to the policy-making style and the little participation in such processes of practitioners who implement policy.

This research makes apparent the impact which the transformation in Chinese society has had on early years practice, which further explains the ambiguous place of practitioners in current policy to practice in early years settings in China. The study results have implications for Chinese early years educators for improving the implementation of policy at the practical level. The study also suggests the need for further investigation into Chinese early years settings in terms of improving practitioners' job efficacy and assessing children's learning outcomes.

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Declaration

The contents of this thesis are the sole work of the author unless specifically referenced. This work has not been previously submitted for any other awards.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to explore how early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy and theories are constructed, understood and translated into practice in the early years sector in China. It undertakes the task of a critical examination of the various characteristics of Chinese ECEC. It argues that the processes of policy-making and implementation in early years education are deeply rooted in the cultural, social and economic processes which have taken place in the country. These have contributed to a construction of the child, childhood and its socialisation, including education, in a manner which is evolving, in terms of the ways in which people understand and internalise such concepts. It is therefore timely to look at such processes as the country moves into a significant position in the world economic order.

It is generally accepted that ECEC is a long-term 'investment' (UNESCO, 2004), which includes the contribution to physical, mental, and social development of young children, the increased probability for these children to progress to higher levels of education, and the human development over the long term (Van der Gaag, 2002; 2004). Much research in this area shows the direct relationship of economic investment in ECEC to the long term benefits for children's brain development, their school retention, and, hence, the human capital (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Zigler, 1994; Weikart, 2000; Van der Gaag, 2002; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). However, ECEC in China generally seems to be a neglected topic of educational research. In particular, the analysis of the views and perceptions of practitioners (i.e. head

teachers and teachers) and parents – two groups of people who ultimately influence the policy implementation – has not yet been undertaken.

Most educational research to date, in China, has mainly focused on primary, secondary, and higher education, with very little attention being given to ECEC. With the influences of Western perspectives on play, some theoretical work investigating topics, such as teaching and learning through play and personal development through children's self-initiated play (Liu, 2000a, Zhang, 2000a) has been undertaken. As yet, there is scarcely any research from the qualitative paradigm to examine ECEC policy development and implementation, or the influence of theory and practice with reference to those who ultimately will make policy a reality. Most of the research currently conducted in China focuses on the preschool curriculum reform and new forms of pedagogy, which aim to adopt a play-based curriculum to encourage children's creativity and imagination. In recent years, ideas based on providing children with holistic (i.e. social, emotional, intellectual, and physical) development have been integrated into the kindergarten curriculum reform. However, studies of both implementation and practice, with the intention of understanding the perspectives and beliefs of practitioners towards the process of policy implementation, have been left aside in Chinese educational research.

This research therefore is designed to respond to such perceived shortage of empirical research on ECEC in Chinese society. It seeks to draw attention to the role of practitioners' and parents' understanding in implementing ECEC policy and practice. In addition, this study further examines the less studied side of policy implementation processes, the daily practice and operation of schools,

and practitioners' and parents' discourses which ultimately give meaning to the discourses of policy.

This research has looked at the daily activities of practitioners to examine their understanding of policy, the role of such understanding plays in the formation of their beliefs, perspectives and attitudes towards ECEC and the extent to which these are reflected in the implementation of policy in practice. It examines their intentions with regard to enhancing children's education, dealing with and promoting parental involvement, solving problems in relation to child rearing, making decisions in terms of children's nature and nurture, and explaining problems embedded in the process of implementation at the practical level. The implementation of ECEC policy is seen as an umbrella within which all elements are encompassed in practice.

The study begins with an extensive account of general national ECEC. Looking at the policy and theory in the preschool sector provides background information and elements for the theoretical framework of the study. It further presents a detailed analysis of current policy and practice in preschool settings. Then, the research considers the perceptions of practitioners, head teachers, teachers, and parents, showing how the profound influence of traditional Chinese wisdom (Confucianism) is embedded in their beliefs about ECEC, their understandings of ECEC policy and theory, and their ability to translate them into practice.

Three interwoven themes have been put forward in this study. Firstly, the implementation of ECEC policy and putting theory into practice has always had great significance in terms of children's intellectual development and educational preparedness. Secondly, practitioners' perceptions, beliefs and values about

ECEC have had a direct influence on their understanding of ECEC policy, as well as their practice. Finally, the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level has been shaped by organisational, social, cultural, and political issues (Labaree, 1997) which are deeply rooted in Chinese society and the early years sector. Consequently, it is argued that the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level is perceived as problematic, and more attention needs to be paid by policy makers to ensure a more efficient implementation through communication, guidance, and training at the practical level.

Rationale for the study

Research evidence (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Fisher, 2002; Van der Gaag, 2002; UNESCO, 2004; Sylva *et al.*, 2004) shows that the early years of a child are a critical period for brain development. During the first five years, a child will achieve an enormous growth of linguistic, conceptual, social, emotional, and motor competence (Bruner, 1966; Bowman, *et al.,* 2001). Children's capacity to learn is described as 'at flood-readiness' (Brierley, 1994). From birth, a healthy child develops a range of skills which enable him/her actively to engage in learning, exploring, and understanding the surrounding world. In a relatively short time, the child begins to construct ideas and theories about how things work in the world (Piaget, 1972; Bowman, *et al.,* 2001). In this respect, early childhood education can be seen as an increasingly common solution to the problem of how to care for and educate young children, to support their brain development, and to prepare them for formal schooling. Such an understanding of the role of early childhood education for children's subsequent development is reflected in current Chinese perspectives on early childhood education.

Generally, the current situation in China resembles the characteristics of postmodernity (Appignanesi, Garratt, Sardar, & Curry, 2006) in an era of rapid and dramatic changes. As Braudel (1980) described, it 'breaks the old cycles and the traditional customs of man' (p.215). In particular, remarkable differences have been noticed in terms of culture, economics, social contexts, and traditional values, among others. Such a rapidly changing context has affected childhood by offering young children more choices in terms of living and schooling. However, rapid changes in society increase the need for changes in the context of early childhood education to deal with the potential effects, both positive and negative, on young children of living in a changing world.

Under such circumstances, newly evolved understandings of childhood and ways of researching early years socialisation and care have been proposed (Tobin, 1995). In so doing, researchers have explored new paradigms, mostly from the qualitative tradition, examining the lives of children and childhood as social constructs. This shift reflects the interest in wider social processes affecting the lives of children in various contexts (Alvesson, 2002). Among the research conducted within the last two decades, multicultural research with young children has consistently shown that children are not only aware of the wide diversity, changes, and differences, but they have also internalised views of their society (Banks, 1993). This study argues that such a situation pertains also to Chinese children and their social organisations.

China is a country facing profound social, economic and political transformation (Chen & Liu, 2000). Education is considered to be an important part of official Chinese policy for social development. In this respect, ECEC is regarded as the

core of the country's educational policy for social and economic development (UNESCO, 2004). Consequently, Chinese early childhood education is geared to providing children with a comprehensive curriculum in order to enhance their intellectual development and school preparedness. It has its own early childhood education principles based on traditional child rearing methods where conformity, collective values, and outcomes are of paramount importance.

In the traditional Chinese view, it is believed that a child's character is shaped by experience (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989*)*.Thus, parents and teachers bear the responsibility for inculcating in the child appropriate behaviours and self-restraint (conformity) (Tobin, *et al*., 1989). In addition, regimentation and control are also at the core of Chinese upbringing principles (Tobin, *et al*., 1989). However, such traditional views, embedded in concepts of Chinese ECEC, are currently facing internal and external challenges (Chen & Liu, 2000).

Internal challenges relate to changing family structures. Since the 1970s, the Chinese government has implemented the 'One Child Policy' (*独生子女政策*, 1979) (Li, 2003), and as a consequence every couple may only have one child (Li, 2003) who, in turn, will take the responsibility for maintaining the family unit and its welfare (Tobin, *et al.,* 1989). As a result, such a policy requires Chinese parents and other supporting social institutions to consider possible implications for child care and rearing, as well as the potential dangers of overindulging the child (Tobin, *et al.,* 1989). ECEC provision is regarded as an appropriate solution to care for and educate young children in a social setting. External challenges relate to the increasing influence of foreign values (Chen & Liu, 2000). Modern theories of child development, generated outside China, have prompted Chinese

early years educators to consider other ways of child rearing and to review their early years education curriculum. Such conceptual issues are extensively addressed in this study.

Researching Chinese early childhood education and care

As already stated, until now ECEC has been given low priority within the Chinese educational system. An explanation for this may be the strong role of the family in the upbringing and care of children. During the past decades, little attention had been given to ECEC in Chinese educational research. In particular, the examination of practitioners' constructions, understandings, values and needs, as well as their impact on the implementation of ECEC policy has been ignored. This lack of attention to the field of early childhood education research has resulted in a shortage of empirical studies and papers. Although a few studies, focused on early childhood education, had been conducted by some Chinese researchers, the topics of such studies relate mainly to the early years curriculum and the feasibility of adopting a play-based curriculum such as those commonly used in the West (Liu, 2000b; Zhang, 2000b; Li & Li, 2001; Li & Li, 2003); others consist, purely, of a theoretical explanation of current early childhood education (Yu, 2000; Zhao, 2001; Zhang & Xing, 2002). Some studies relate to the transfer of Western ideas into China without much consideration of the problematic nature of the impact of importing models of education and care; others promote the needs in terms of children's development and preparation for formal education at the age of seven (Feng, 2000; Liu, 2000c; Shi, 2000). However, most of these studies fail to provide any detailed critical analysis for

comparison with the modern child. The absence of research on the early childhood sector not only reflects the low importance given to ECEC compared with other phases of schooling, but also highlights the low status of early years practitioners.

In recent years, this situation has gradually changed as a result of rapid Chinese transformation and the strong influence of Western theories of child education brought in by scholars trained overseas, especially from the USA. More and more studies related to early childhood education have been conducted and an increasing number of relevant publications are now available. However, very few of these studies and publications relate to the implementation of ECEC policy and theory in practice with reference to stakeholders (i.e. head teachers, teachers and parents). More importantly, most of these studies have remained uncritical of the status of early childhood education in relation to current social, economic, and political transformation in China. A further reason for focusing on the Chinese early childhood sector in this study is that, although the importance of ECEC has been gradually recognised, key issues regarding teacher preparation, parental expectations and views, financial investment, social return, and ECEC policy-making, still need further investigation.

Currently in China, kindergarten practitioners (i.e. head teachers and teachers) lack either explicit guidelines on how to implement the policy in practice or sufficient training on understanding of ECEC policy and theory. It is observed that there have no clear definitions of good practice for kindergarten teachers to follow. It appears to be challenging for kindergarten teachers to obtain concrete, comprehensive, and standard guidelines on implementing the new policy in their

daily activities. Meanwhile, Chinese parents also have the challenge of dealing with single children's common problems. This study aims to analyse the processes by which Chinese ECEC practitioners develop their understanding of ECEC policy and the extent to which opportunities are available for further improvement of policy implementation, in line with the national social policy for education.

Personal engagement with the research

When doing my Masters degree in the United Kingdom, I gradually became interested in the area of ECEC, especially the observation of a kind of teaching and learning practice based on a 'child-centred approach' (OECD, 2001). The more I became acquainted with theoretical tenets and policy development for young children in the European Union (EU), the more the feasibility of transferring the Western concept of ECEC, especially the play-based and child-centred approaches, into the daily practice of Chinese early years settings appealed. Subsequently, for my Masters' dissertation I researched the use of play as a tool for teaching and learning in Chinese kindergartens (Bai, 2003).

In my final dissertation, I argued that the use of play for teaching and learning in Chinese kindergartens was currently understood in several ways, some of which differed from that in Europe: i) play elements were always used as part of teaching in daily activities; ii) teachers did not use play as the main teaching method because their conceptualisation of play was based on traditional Chinese perspectives; iii) the use of play for teaching was restricted by constraints which emphasised children's learning outcomes and preparation for

formal schooling (Bai, 2003). Hence, the attempt to transfer Western concepts of early childhood education into Chinese settings without taking account of the Chinese context seemed problematic (Bai, 2003).

However, I have gradually understood that Western child developmental theories cannot provide a complete understanding of how Chinese children learn and develop (Chan, 2004). Western theories cannot be adopted in Chinese ECEC sectors unless they are combined with an understanding of Chinese cultural values. Moreover, while doing the Masters' field work, several other issues were identified, which remained unresolved. Therefore, I decided to examine Chinese ECEC with a focus on policy and, through deconstructing original Chinese perspectives of children and children's learning and reconstructing such perspectives in contemporary social, economic, and political transformation, to understand how the implementation of policy takes place and the extent to which the policy has shaped ECEC discourses, understanding, and constructions of ECEC in China.

As a researcher studying outside China for more than four years, my original way of thinking, based on Chinese culture, has been restructured into a combination of Chinese and Western perspectives. Moreover, I have developed a wider conceptualisation of the field and have engaged with taking apart the 'taken for granted' assumptions of ECEC. Indeed, my original views on Chinese ECEC have been turned 'upside down' (Cannella, 2005). On the basis of my restructured perspectives, I am, therefore, trying to seek for the 'otherwise' (Mac Naughton, 2005) in order to make better sense of the current situation and status of Chinese ECEC.

By adopting an outside-in perspective (Baez, 1998), I examine important concepts and principles from a critical stance. Being a Chinese scholar, I also benefit from the inside-out perspective (Baez, 1998, *op.cit.*) which allows me to bring a deep knowledge of the country to set against international principles prevailing in the ECEC field. I feel strongly about investigating Chinese ECEC in accordance with postmodern thinking (Appignanesi, *et al.*, 2006) which in this thesis is used to de-construct and re-construct the ECEC field and its allied disciplines. Consequently, I now recognise that the attempt to transfer Western ECEC theories to China is not my intention, especially considering the possible implications for cultural and social issues associated with such transfer. My interest, in this thesis, is more concerned with how practitioners 'make policy' through the day to day operations and the meanings they attach to their daily practice with children and parents.

With this particular awareness, the study engages with Chinese ECEC through the lens of postmodernism which allows me to identify issues and rationales for practice without taking anything for granted. Therefore, I shall try to understand such issues by examining ECEC settings and their day to day operation within the context of historical and current cultural, social, and economic factors.

Research questions

This study focuses on current policy for ECEC in the changing social context of China. The examination of ECEC policy, practice, and discourses provides the focus. An in-depth analysis of current policy (at the macro level), as interpreted and implemented in local practice (at the micro level), is undertaken (Layder,

1993). Little is known about the ways in which ECEC policy is conceptualised, constructed, and acted out in the context of deep social transformations in China. Hence, the study has a central research question:

How is Chinese ECEC policy understood, translated and put into practice in early years settings and to what extent do contextual factors influence the implementation of ECEC policy?

Such a research question comes from the need to focus on early years provision (kindergartens), because kindergartens are perceived in the policy as the place where child education and care programmes are carried out, but policy discourse does not deal with issues of teachers' in-service training, parental satisfaction, and practitioners' views.

A full answer to the central research question requires that other subsidiary questions be addressed. In that sense, another three questions are included in order to investigate the policy implementation at the practical level and to explain why the national ECEC policy has been shaped in certain ways which are identified in this research.

1. What contextual factors have shaped Chinese ECEC policy?

2. What factors have influenced the implementation of policy at the practical level in Jiangxi Province?

3. What are the general attitudes and perceptions towards policy implementation at the practical level particularly in Jiangxi Province?

The first question aims to understand what internal and external factors have

affected the constitution of Chinese ECEC policy. In particular, the traditional cultural beliefs and values which shape the policy and the broader social, cultural, and economic trends which influence the policy are investigated. Further, an in-depth discussion of how these factors impact on development of Chinese ECEC is also included. The second question pays particular attention to the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level. The investigation of policy implementation in both public and private settings focuses on curriculum organisation, teachers' training, parental involvement, children's achievement, and preparation for formal school in order to present, in detail, the practice in each individual kindergarten. The final question critically examines the practical factors identified through this research at different kindergartens in Jiangxi province in order to understand why the implementation of policy takes its current form. In addition, issues related to practical difficulties clarified in this research are presented and discussed.

A brief outline of the research design

In this study, Chinese ECEC policy and practice are deconstructed (Derrida, 1997; 2002; Alvesson, 2002), conceptualised, reconstructed, theorised, and analysed. This research is designed as a result of perceiving the need to examine policy and practice through practitioners' perspectives, in Chinese early childhood settings. This research focuses on the central question: How is Chinese ECEC policy translated and put into practice in early years settings and how do practical factors influence the implementation of ECEC policy? In order to find out the answer, a multiple case study approach was adopted as the main method which combined documentation, questionnaires, observations, and

interviews for data collection.

As mentioned earlier, ECEC has recently become the focus of attention in the education field in contemporary China. The ideas and principles of ECEC have been identified in various official documents, guidelines, and then in daily educational practice. However, ECEC has long been undervalued and has been paid comparatively less attention than other areas of education. For this reason, the multiple case study approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data which enable comparison among the samples through both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, has been chosen. Therefore, conclusions can be drawn through analysing empirical data collected through the research.

Another reason for adopting the multiple case study approach is the recognition of Chinese culture which is heavily embedded in the pre-school sector. From visiting some kindergartens and talking to practitioners, the researcher gained a sense that both head teachers and teachers involved in the study tended to demonstrate 'best performance' to the visitor, and also tended to give a 'positive response' to the questions the researcher raised. Anticipating that their intention of being 'polite' and 'best' might influence the authenticity of the data, other instruments were employed, such as documentation, questionnaires, observations, and interviews, to gain a more complete picture of respondents from several angles, and also to be able to generalise findings emerging from the study.

The study was undertaken in several stages. Firstly, a wide range of documentation was analysed to obtain general ECEC information and used to define the boundaries of the study and the framework. Therefore, national and

provincial ECEC policy and regulations, such as educational laws, curriculum guidance, instructions, relevant research papers, and official statistics were gathered. In addition, information related to kindergarten curricula, curriculum plans, activity plans, activity photos, and term time schedules were also collected. This information was regarded as one of the most relevant forms of data, which helped to substantiate the framework for the research. After discussion with participants and having obtained their consent to be participants in the study, specific information such as individual teaching plans, annual training reviews, annual teaching summaries, written observations, parents' feedback, and photographic recordings were gathered. Data, together with the official and non-official discourses related to ECEC, in the form of conversations and interviews, were also collected for subsequent review. The data were analysed textually to provide an overview of the nature of Chinese ECEC. Information regarding how ECEC is perceived and delivered within the early years sector was highlighted and revisited in the later stages.

Secondly, questionnaires were sent out to practitioners to seek data on their constructions and understanding of ECEC. The data were analysed and generated a series of statistics showing how ECEC policy and theory were perceived in different settings, which provided a basis for the subsequent observations and interviews. Soon after the questionnaires were sent out, a series of class observations were conducted with three teachers of different age groups in each kindergarten. Observations were carried out over two school terms to collect a comprehensive view of teachers' practice over an extended time.

Finally, semi-structured in-depth interviews with selected head teachers, teachers, and parents were conducted. These interviews provide valuable insight into the way practitioners construct, understand, and implement ECEC in their everyday practice. After finalising the data collection, it was coded, categorised, simplified, and interpreted. Because the informants had produced data in Chinese, transcripts of interviews were presented to them for verification. This ensured that their meanings were clearly recorded. The verification by informants also helped to clarify misunderstandings, and allowed discussion of any confusion which might have emerged during the process of organising the data in preparation for the analysis, and correction of subjectivity bias and mistakes, if any, on interpretations. A process of translation into English (Baez, 1998) was necessary at this stage bearing in mind considerations of working with data produced in a language other than English.

During all stages of this study, all information provided by participants remained the property of the researcher and strict adherence to ethical guidelines was followed (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000). In addition, efforts were made to follow procedures in place for the conduct of research in kindergartens in China.

Significance of the study

This study aims to shed light on current ECEC policy implementation in the Chinese context, by searching for meaningful understanding of practitioners' constructions of how ECEC policy is implemented. Through the investigation, issues embedded in implementation processes which affect both implementation

and practice are revealed. In addition, the research examines how the perspectives, beliefs, and values of those involved in early years education affect their practice. By collecting data from different sources, findings from this research provide information from a variety of angles and present a comprehensive picture of the context of ECEC in China from the general (policy-making level) to the more specific (individuals including teachers and parents) (Layder, 1993).

The research provides valuable information in order 1) to improve understanding of practitioners' practice in pre-school settings; 2) to assist those involved in educational planning and implementation to develop appropriate programmes and training in order to enable pre-school teachers to understand policy, problems, theory, and children's rights and needs in daily practice; 3) to provide insight for pre-school practitioners on the necessity of reflecting policy and theory in daily practice, while understanding parents' beliefs and perceptions of the importance of ECEC; 4) to encourage further investigation in relation to ECEC from a post-modern perspective and analysis.

Outline and structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, this thesis comprises eight chapters. Each of the chapters provides a detailed account of the process of theorising ECEC in China (through deconstructing and reconstructing) and the processes of policy implementation from the constructions and understanding of practitioners and parents who ultimately make policy implementation happen in the kindergartens. Each chapter is described as follows:

Chapter one begins with background information on this study, and then discusses the development of ECEC from a historical perspective. The purpose of the historical review is to build up a connection between the past and the present (Mac Naughton, 2005) in order to present a clear picture of how ECEC has developed in China. In addition, this chapter presents key issues from relevant literature, which shape the current ECEC. The chapter ends with a review of quality and effectiveness of ECEC in Western contexts. The chapter includes a discussion of the development of Chinese ECEC, pre- and post-1949. It continues with a discussion of ECEC programmes provided by Chinese early years sectors. Key issues, including teacher training programmes as well as other factors which have shaped the development of Chinese ECEC, are discussed to build up a holistic picture of Chinese ECEC. To position Chinese ECEC within a broader context which helps to shape current policy, a discussion of Western values of quality and effectiveness of early childhood education and care is also included.

Chapter two contains a detailed analysis of traditional Chinese cultural perspectives towards the child, childhood, and early childhood education. It further engages with reconstructing current ECEC on the basis of understanding contemporary social, economic, and political transformation in Chinese society. This chapter starts with a review of Chinese perspectives on education focusing particularly on the perspective towards early childhood education. Engaging with concepts of 'the ideal child', 'future success', 'control or regimentation (管, *guan*)', 'play', 'parental involvement', and so forth, this attempts to build up a detailed understanding of how Chinese people value early years education for children's

future development and success.

On the basis of understanding how Chinese people value the early intervention provided by early years sectors and how such understandings affect their behaviour towards ECEC, the chapter continues with a discussion of contemporary changes in Chinese society. It attempts to theorise current ECEC within a broad social, economic, and political context where Western values and perspectives towards the child, childhood, and child education have considerable influence on the development of Chinese ECEC. In addition, it shows how the contemporary changes have also impacted on Chinese people's perspectives towards education and development. In so doing, the chapter builds up a detailed framework to underpin the investigation of this research.

Chapter three presents a detailed description of the research methodology, the design, and the process of undertaking the study. The research questions are first presented to clarify the overall objectives of this research which includes an examination of the qualitative approach, the final choice of an approach with both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the employment of a multiple case study. The research design for studying Chinese ECEC then follows. With reference to the pilot study, this chapter explains how the pilot study influenced the final decisions about research design and data collection methods for the main study.

Having presented the research design, the chapter continues with a discussion of the conduct of the field work. The selection of the sample is first explained. It further presents the research instruments in great detail in which a questionnaire survey, documentary analysis, unstructured observations, and semi-structured

interviews were employed to collect comprehensive data. Most importantly, the chapter presents how the data were processed and analysed. By presenting the rationale for the analytical framework, a clear account of how the data were further conceptualised and theorised is provided. Issues in relation to the role of the researcher, validity, reliability, and ethics are also included in this chapter.

Chapter four goes on to conceptualise the data on how Chinese ECEC policy is translated into daily practice. The data presented in this chapter mainly come from: a) documents, which include kindergarten managerial documents (guidelines and regulations), teachers' teaching plans, and national policy; b) questionnaire data, which include statistics and written information from open-ended questions; c) observation notes which were collected during various classroom activities in order to describe teachers' practice in kindergartens; d) interviews, which provide further opportunities to investigate issues related to curriculum organisation, teacher training, parental involvement, and so forth. It aims to compare what teachers said with what they actually did by comparing interview data with class observations. By combining these four different sources of data, a full description of daily practice in each kindergarten is produced.

Chapter five continues to focus on the conceptualisation of data in terms of how early years practitioners (head teachers and teachers) and parents perceive ECEC at the practical level. Similar to the data analysis processes in Chapter four, the data presented in this chapter were mainly gathered from the same sources. However, much attention is paid to making meaning through interpreting 'discourses' embedded in conversations, behaviours, and incidental comments. Furthermore, the chapter engages with the difficulties that early

years practitioners have faced when implementing the policy, in order to present how implementation at the practical level can be influenced by factors such as parental expectation, the nature of policy-making, etc.. Meanwhile, the discussion of parental perceptions provides information which is compared with practitioners' perspectives in order to identify similarities and differences.

Chapter six builds up a discussion in terms of theorising Chinese ECEC practice on the basis of the data presented in Chapters four and five by critically engaging with issues such as curriculum arrangements, transition to formal schooling, parental perspectives, and practitioners' perceptions, in order to understand and explain why identified issues have occurred in Chinese early years settings. The first section of this chapter examines the current policy-making style in China which ignores differences in regions and economy. It further suggests the need to change the nature of policy making at the upper level. The second section critically argues that kindergartens and parents actively affect the implementation of policy. However, the real needs of the practitioners and parents are not taken into consideration by policy makers.

Chapter seven further positions and reconstructs the implementation of ECEC policy in China. However, unlike the discussion in Chapter six which focused more on institutional factors in real settings, this chapter situates the implementation of ECEC policy within a broader context which considers both traditional Chinese cultural values and Western perspectives in order to understand the implementation of ECEC policy in China. It further explains how far both Chinese and Western perspectives have shaped Chinese understanding towards child socialisation and hence the practitioners'

behaviours when implementing the policy.

The final Chapter concludes with a summary and an evaluation of the research that includes assessing the research design, theoretical background, and the analytical framework. This chapter then goes on to discuss the research findings, in relation to the research questions and existing literature. In particular, the conclusion also considers the implications of this study and proposes areas for future investigation in Chinese early years contexts on the basis of research findings from the current research.

Chapter 1 Background to the Research

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, increasing attention has been given to early years education and its services from a global perspective (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). ECEC is therefore discussed as a condition for human development (Young, 1997; Van der Gaag, 2004). In addition, it also links to the social and economic infrastructure of healthy and wealthy local communities (Young, 1997). As women join the labour market, the demand for non-parental care has grown (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). ECEC is recognised as a major means to enhance children's developmental potential and academic performance, and to protect them from problems of social and educational disadvantage. However, there are big national variations in the ways early years' policy and programmes are designed, funded, and delivered (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999). China, as the focus of this study, has its own ways of nurturing its young children. It is influenced by unique Chinese cultural perspectives towards the child, its construction of childhood, and hence its view of child education. Nevertheless, the concept of children's education in contemporary China is changing towards a combination of Chinese perspectives and Western conceptualisations and understandings of the child as an active participant (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

In that sense, this chapter begins by discussing issues associated with human development and changes in Chinese early years education. It engages with debates and research on education and care raised in both Chinese and

Western ECEC contexts to present a general background in which this study is located. The development of Chinese ECEC provides a rationale for its current state. Furthermore, key issues, which have shaped current ECEC, are also identified and discussed. In so doing, the chapter aims to construct an argument based on the history of Chinese ECEC and current Chinese child education and care perspectives, emerging from both Chinese and Western perspectives.

1.1 The development of Chinese ECEC

Since the late 1970s, China has gone through significant changes economically, politically and culturally (Li, 2003). The development of educational policy in response to the modernisation of the country has also been undertaken (Young, 1997). Aware of the important role that young children's education plays, the Chinese government has put the development of ECEC on the national agenda (Zhu, 2002). Currently, almost every child in China between the ages of three and six years attends preschool (MOE Survey, 2004).

This significant enrolment of children in preschool can be explained through a discussion of historical, cultural, and economic factors (Zhu, 2002). This is an important consideration in this study. As referred to in the literature, it is relevant to understand the past to interpret the present (Mac Naughton, 2005). This section of the chapter presents an analysis of the historical and cultural background of current Chinese early childhood education.

1.1a Chinese ECEC pre-1949

Similar to other countries, Chinese ECEC has not been exempted from the

influence of the social and educational philosophical frameworks imported from other countries (Corter, Janmohammed, Zhang, & Bertrand, 2006). The beginning of Western encroachments in China began in 1842 with what is known in Chinese history as the Chinese defeat (Li, 2003). By the end of the nineteenth century, China had suffered from military invasion, economic, and political domination under a colonial regime. A significant number of Chinese scholars who studied in Japan, the United States of America, and Europe had considered the implementation of social and political reforms as a means of protecting China from foreign invasion and colonisation. Among those scholars, Kang Youwei (*康有为*, 1858-1927) was the first to suggest that public education for young children could be the first step towards social reform. As a result, the early influences of the reform movement of 1898 and the missionary activities of imperialist powers stimulated the reform of education (Zhenghao, 1993; Wu, 1996). As early as 1902, the Qing government established a new education system, and began to provide children with preschool education (*幼儿教育*) at 'school of enlightenment' (i.e. the place for the foundation education, *蒙学堂*) (Wu, 1992).

After the bitter defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (*中日甲午战争*) of 1894 and 1895, the success achieved by Japan had astonished Chinese reformers. Consequently, it was considered that learning from Japanese technological development and their educational system perhaps could help China's drive for social and political reforms. Zhang Zhidong (*张之洞*, 1837-1909), governor of Hunan (*湖南*) and Hubei (*湖北*), advocated the reform of the traditional education system, convinced that China must learn from Japan and the West while

remaining true to its past, and accordingly he reorganised and expanded the Chinese educational system.

As a result, the first nursery school (*托儿所*) was founded in Wuchang (*武昌*), Hubei province in 1903 when 20 teachers were brought to China from Japan. The nursery school adopted the Japanese pre-school care and equipment regulations. In addition, the nursery school offered one 3-hour session every day to children of the city aged 5 to 6 and the length of schooling was one year. Conversation, handicraft, singing songs and playing games were the main subjects provided by the nursery school. In 1905, the Head of the Ministry of Education established another nursery school called Yan Shi nursery school (*严适幼儿园*) in Tianjin (*天津*). Similar to the Hubei nursery school, this school modelled its management style and teaching on the Japanese model in operation in Hubei (Wu, 1992).

The first Shanghai Public Nursery School (*上海公立托儿所*) was founded in 1907. This school provided education for young children and training for teachers. The Japanese model of pre-school education adopted by most Chinese pre-schools was mainly implemented through conducting different subject-based curricula. However, the early years education system was not unified in terms of set criteria on children's age, the length of the programme or even the curriculum provided by each school.

Following the 1911 revolution and after World War I, the Chinese resisted Japanese influences in educational and cultural affairs and looked more toward American and European models of preschool education until the founding of the

People's Republic of China in 1949 (Spodek, 1989; Zhenghao, 1993). Western ideas of education had a great impact on education reforms (Wu, 1992). Following such Western values and ways of thinking, Chinese pre-school education adopted concepts from Western theories on child education. From the Froebelian tradition of the West, the new name 'kindergarten' (*幼儿园*) was introduced to designate a pre-school setting along with its educational principles. Therefore, in 1922, the government reviewed the guidelines of the educational system and renamed all preschools as 'kindergarten' (*幼儿园*).

In 1929, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines for a standard kindergarten curriculum. During that period, early years education theories such as those of Froebel (1782-1852), Montessori (1870-1952), and Dewey (1859-1952) had a major impact on Chinese kindergarten education. Consequently, Dewey and his child-centred educational philosophy were expounded in China. He advocated ending the traditional 'preoccupation with subject matter' and urged devoting attention to the child instead, giving children credit for a natural motivation to learn, and also stressing their need to move around and participate in the learning process. However, leading Chinese early educators, such as Tao Xingzhi (*陶行之*, 1891-1946) and Chen Heqin (*陈鹤琴*, 1892-1982) also put a Chinese cast on developing kindergartens (Shi, 1989). Resonating with Dewey's ideas, Tao and Chen criticised traditional Chinese kindergartens for overemphasising the learning of ancient texts and not incorporating enough physical activities into the curriculum. This did not necessarily follow Dewey's Western ideas of children and childhood, but was concerned with issues of the state of children in China especially those children from disadvantaged

backgrounds.

Tao Xingzhi was devoted to establishing 'kindergartens' open to all Chinese. Consequently, he sponsored the establishment of four kindergartens in suburbs of Nanjing (*南京*), the kindergarten for children of labourers in Shanghai (*上海*), and funded education and training programmes for kindergarten teachers in rural areas. Tao Xingzhi argued that kindergartens modelled on other countries turned children into 'customers of exotic products' (Tao, 1926) and the costs of running kindergartens based on Western models were several times higher than that for primary schools. In addition, tuition fees for kindergartens were high and unaffordable to most Chinese. Thus, children from an average family, and especially those from poor families, could not have access to preschool services.

In kindergartens established or funded by Tao Xingzhi, he tried to incorporate elements of the Chinese culture to make them accessible to all families by adopting the following strategies: firstly, to equip kindergartens with Chinese materials instead of foreign resources. However, foreign materials were not prohibited and could be used to supplement Chinese music, poems, fairy tales, and toys; secondly, to make kindergartens less expensive. According to Tao Xingzhi, teacher training could be carried out in local areas and teaching resources could be hand made by teachers, parents, and local craftsmen; thirdly, to create funding for poor people, so that children from average-income or poor families were not excluded from accessing kindergartens.

In contrast to Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin (1892-1982), a child psychologist who studied at Columbia University in 1917 and was strongly influenced by Western

developmental psychology, advocated the need to provide children with a flexible and integrated instructive model of education and to ensure children's freedom to learn. Chen Heqin (1924) pointed out that existing kindergartens provided children with few opportunities to learn through direct interaction with nature. Most of the children's learning was based on pictures, books, or teachers' descriptions, but not on the natural environment. He also pointed out that children had little choice of activities. Those provided for children only included reading, paper folding, singing, sand playing, and block building. Most activities were carried out in groups, which provided inadequate opportunities for each child to participate.

Additionally, Chen suggested that children should be at the centre of kindergarten education and teachers should take the role of guiding children throughout the learning process (Chen, 1924). This approach, which has been the core of ECEC in the West, is being currently challenged in early years education practice (Lubeck, 1994; Lubeck, 1998; Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007). It seems that in practice the child-centeredness becomes abstract and causes problems (Cannella, 2005) in terms of understanding 'who is the child on whom practice is centred' (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, p. 43). In that sense, the postmodern promotion of deconstructing the dominant notions of child and child development (Cannella, 2005; Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007) becomes significant in the Chinese context.

With an anticipatory vision in 1927, Chen Heqin advocated the need for reforming Chinese early childhood education. His arguments were based on the rationale of the need for cultural relevance of kindergarten education. He pointed

out aspects to be considered in a curriculum and its delivery, and the role of the state in securing and providing access to education in cooperation with the family: (i) He argued that kindergartens should adapt to the situation of China. He noted that the kindergarten programmes copied from the United States of America might not be suitable for Chinese children because of cultural differences between the two countries. His argument in relation to culturally embedded practice is reflected in the postmodern perspective towards early childhood education. This view is reflected and supported by prominent early years scholars (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999; Cannella, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005; Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007) that the so-called beneficial Western child development approach cannot be fully functioned among diverse cultures and societies.

(ii) He saw a co-operative role between the state and parents in that both families and kindergartens should share the responsibility for children's education. Cooperation between parents and kindergartens could boost the efficacy of early education because the skills and knowledge learnt in kindergartens could be enhanced by parental reinforcement at home. This idea is reflected in contemporary arguments (OECD, 2001) that parents are the first and primary educators of children. Although parents may spend less time with their children due to their long working hours, their formative influence on young children's personal, social, and cognitive development remains central (OECD, 2001). Furthermore, parents are the primary experts on their children and can help ECEC practitioners foster the continuity of learning at home (OECD, 2001). On the basis of these arguments of parental involvement in young children's learning for subsequent schooling, contemporary Chinese ECEC policy and

theory have incorporated such ideas into practice (Zhu, 2002). A detailed discussion of this issue will be further presented in Chapter 5 in order to understand the influences of this argument on practice in current early years settings.

(iii) Child-centeredness was emphasised as key for the delivery of provision. Children's abilities, needs, and interests needed to be considered when developing the curriculum. Activities provided by kindergartens should be related to real world experiences. In addition, kindergartens could play a role in helping children learn how to adapt and live in society. The existing rigid curriculum needed to be replaced by a more flexible one, which considered the different interests, abilities, and needs of children so that greater flexibility could offer children with more free choice.

In this respect, activities were not to be restricted to the classroom but could be held in the outside space providing more opportunities to explore, enjoy, and be in contact with nature. The natural environment could offer a more vivid and real experience compared with pictures, stories, and books. For Chen, music was also considered as a way of teaching. Similar to the argument about parental involvement, Chen's suggestions on classroom activities have had considerable impact on the curriculum organisation and practice in kindergarten sectors (Zhao, 1997). In particular, the use of music or musical instruments in teaching and learning activities is believed to be very helpful for children's learning (Li & Li, 2001). Further discussion of relevant day to day kindergarten practice in real settings will be carried out in Chapter 4.

Chen's thoughts were adopted by many kindergartens including the Jimei

kindergarten (*集美幼儿园*), founded in 1919, which used a more flexible and integrated curriculum. The kindergarten designed a weekly programme to suit children's interests and requirements. Telling stories, performing drama, playing musical instruments, and identifying common plants and animals were included in the programme. Parental involvement through taking part in daily teaching and learning practice was the most significant aspect of the programme. Furthermore, teachers were expected to visit children's families each week to get to know them and to invite parents to meetings which provided opportunities to inform them about their children's behaviour, and to involve them in their children's learning.

Such promotion of parental involvement reflected the current idea of shared parental responsibility for education and learning drawing on parents' unique knowledge about their children (OECD, 2001; Zhu, 2002). Traditionally in Chinese culture, parents have played an important role in children's education and achievement (Lin & Fu, 1990; Chen, Hastings, Rubin, Cen & Stewart, 1998), particularly, in fostering continuity in children's learning and experiences between early years settings and the home. OECD (2001) argues that parental involvement in ECEC can ensure that ECEC programmes cater for individual children's needs, strengths, and interests. The involvement of parents in their child's education will be further discussed in chapter 4 and 5.

Chinese early years education has undergone dramatic changes since 1921, the year of the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, *中国共产党*). Early childhood education under the Communist regime focused primarily on children's health and their ability to survive during wartime (Wu, 1992). Most

early childhood education centres in Yan'an (延安) accommodated children whose parents were at the battlefront. Most early childhood education centres established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provided free education and care programmes for children of soldiers and officers of the Red Army (红军). Consequently, these centres undertook responsibilities to look after children for prolonged periods and became a substitute for parental care. In contrast to the partnership between parents and teachers that Chen Heqin had promoted, these child care centres established by CCP took over sole responsibility, due to the fact that most parents were absent (Wu, 1992). Thus, in this period teachers and caregivers took over all responsibilities for the care and education of young children (Wu, 1992).

Child education in such centres mainly focused on the political agenda. Through involving children in relevant activities, the centres aimed to teach children an allegiance to the CCP and its leaders, to encourage them to join the revolutionary army when they grew up, and to fight for freedom (Chinese Preschool Educational History Group, 2002). In order to secure the goals of ECEC, instruments were designed to assess children's progress; most early childhood education centres regularly tested children's physical and intellectual improvement (see Table 1-1). As presented in Figure 1-1, enrolment rates in preschools increased dramatically between 1929 and 1949, due to the availability of child care and education by the Chinese Communist Party (Chinese Preschool Education History Compiling Group, 2002). More children in rural areas had the opportunity to attend kindergarten, which until then had been inaccessible due to its high cost.

Table 1-1: Sample of test of children's physical and intellectual improvement

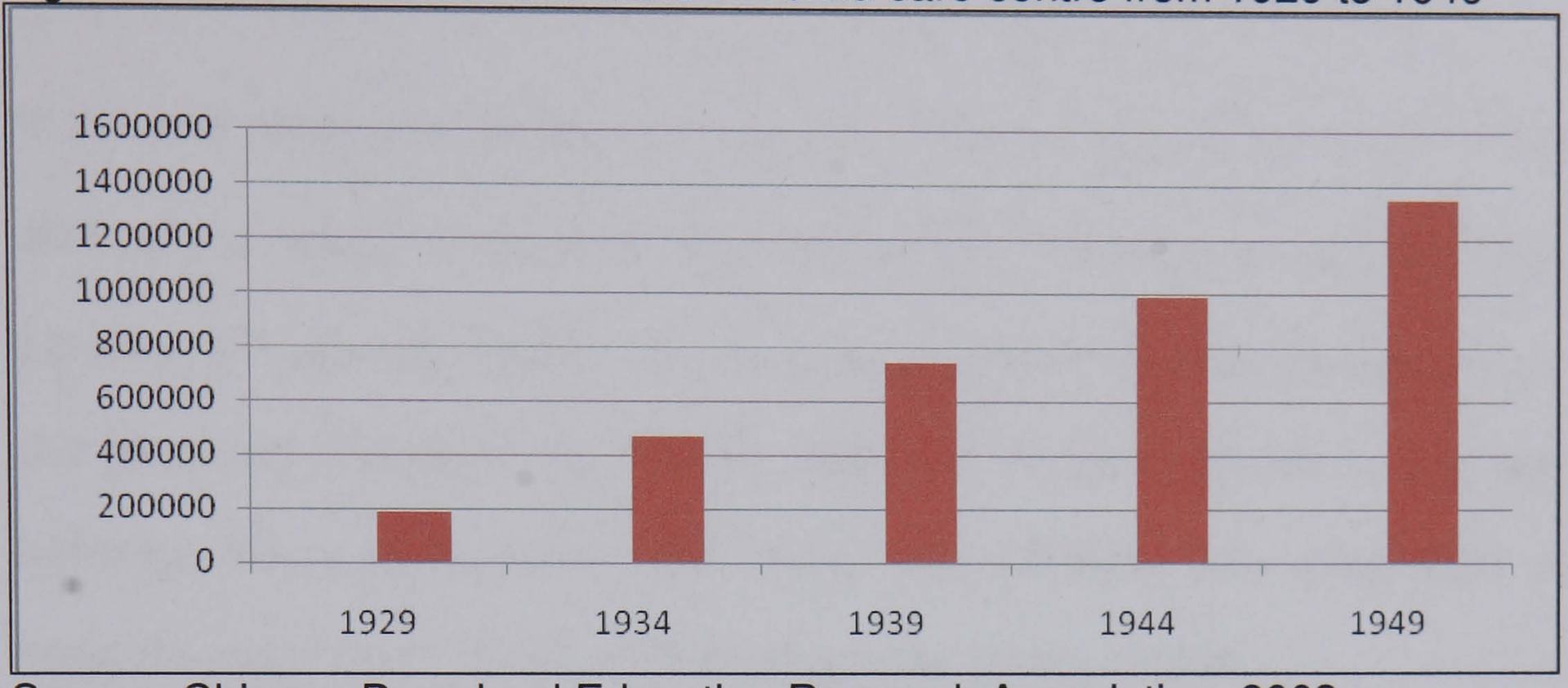
Name:	Grade:	Age:
Height:	Weight:	Health:
Common Sense Test	Who is the leader of our child care centre? Did our army defeat an enemy recently? Why are Jiang Jieshi and Hu Zongnan the enemy of the people? What does a silkworm eat? What does a silkworm produce? What can silk make? What is soap made of? What is the use of soap?	
Intelligence	Arithmetic Drawing Literacy	
Psychological Test	Who is the person you like most? What is your favourite toy? Which class do you like most? What are you afraid of? What will you do when you grow up? What will you say to Chairman Mao if you meet him? What would you do if you caught Chiang Kai-shek?	

Source: Chinese Preschool Educational History Compiling Group, 2002 (*my translation*)

In 1949, the People's Republic of China (*中华人民共和国*) was formally established. On the basis of the traditional Chinese values of hard work, bravery, and respect and care for others (McLoughlin, Pang, & Dong, 1997), the Chinese early years education system was further adjusted in line with the national policy of love for country, people, labour, science, and public property (*爱祖国，爱人民，爱劳动，爱科学，和爱公共财物*, Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). As the second communist country after Russia, China adopted from the Soviet Union not only its economic but also its social policies, including education (Chinese Preschool Educational History Compiling Group, 2002). Kindergarten education thus became part of the socialist experiment to modernise China, which, in turn, became a form of 'Russianised China' (Chinese Preschool Educational History Compiling Group, 2002). Soviet

educators arrived in China to teach both theoretical and practical aspects of education (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003).

Figure 1-1: Total number of children in child care centre from 1929 to 1949



Source: Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003

Meanwhile, Chinese educators and scholars were sent to the Soviet Union to learn from their advanced experience of kindergarten education. In order to teach their new theories of child development and early education, leading Russian psychology and pedagogy texts were translated into Chinese. These theories argued against individual intellectual capacity as innate or predisposed and stressed that instruction, changing the environment (meaning socialist experience), and actively engaging in labour can alter the nervous system or brain structure, and elevate an individual's intelligence (Zhao, 1992a).

In 1952, with the help of educators from the Soviet Union, the Chinese Ministry of Education published the first Provisional Regulation of Kindergarten that aimed to combine Marxist principles of education with the Chinese experience (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). A distinction between 'kindergarten education' and 'care' was made: the former was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the latter was under the direction of the

Ministry of Public Health as well as the Chinese Women's Federation (Wu, 1992). In addition, during the mid-50's kindergarten education training was added to regional universities and kindergartens grew steadily (Corter *et al.*, 2006).

In the new regulation, the term nursery (*托儿所*) was reserved for nurseries that took care of children under three years of age. Kindergartens (*幼儿园*) accepted, full-time, 3-7-year-old children who were divided into three different age groups: 3-5 years old, 5-6 years old, and 6-7 years old. Physical education, language learning, nature study, handicrafts, music and arithmetic were prescribed as essential elements of kindergarten programmes (Zhao, 1992a).

After the establishment of the new government, emphasis was placed on teaching Marxist ideology and loyalty to the government and socialist China. The education of children from an early age through public education was regarded as essential and a vital step in producing socialist workers. Kindergarten pedagogy was defined as, 'the study of how to make children between the ages of three and seven... achieve well developed moral, physical, and intellectual capacities so that they can grow to be conscious of socialism as well as [be] cultured workers' (Nanjing, 1959, p.12). Consequently, moral education, an essential component of the curriculum in kindergartens since the 1950s, emphasised that learning must be 'patriotic to the ancestral land and loyal to communism' (Nanjing, 1959, p.12).

1.1b Chinese ECEC post-1949

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there has been an increasing demand for nurseries and kindergartens, due to the

communist ideology and social reform of the status of women and their socio-economic roles (Zhao, 1992a). According to communist ideology, women were liberated and allowed to participate actively and equally with men in productive activities (Zhao, 1992b). Thus, as soon as children could be separated from their mothers, they could attend institutions run and paid for by the nation to relieve women from the chores of childcare. Therefore, the Communist Party encouraged a nationwide expansion of institutionalised child education and care (Wu, 1992). During this stage of political history, kindergarten education experienced tremendous growth.

In 1958, there were 100 million children in China between the ages of two and seven (Wu, 1992). Therefore, a very large number of nurseries and kindergartens were required to care for them. However, the provision of adequate and good quality education and care to 100 million children so soon after the establishment of the new government was more political rhetoric than reality. In 1949, only 130,000 children attended kindergarten (Zhu, 2002). Three years later (in 1951), 380,000 children entered kindergarten, while more were under the care of provisional nurseries in rural areas (McLoughlin *et al.*, 1997). By 1955 only half a million children in the entire nation attended kindergarten, 0.5% of the total number of preschool aged children, with a staff of 26,361 teachers and head teachers. By 1960 there were over 784, 000 kindergartens in China (See Table 1-2).

In 1955, the Ministries of the Interior, Education, and Public Health issued a unified policy statement to promote the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens to enable greater female participation in economic production. In

addition, factories in cities were ordered to organise childcare facilities and kindergartens. Thus, two years later in 1957 the number of children enrolled had doubled to 1 million.

Table 1-2: Number of kindergartens from 1949 to 1965

Years	Number of Kindergartens	Children Enrolment	Teachers Numbers
Before 1949	1,301	130,213	N/A
1951		380,000	N/A
1955		500,00	26,361
1956	18,500	1,081,000	N/A
1957		1,000,000	N/A
1965	19,200	1,713,000	N/A

Source: Wu, (1992); MOE Survey (1998) (*my translation*)

In China, as elsewhere, the majority of kindergarten teachers are female (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). In spite of the new roles of women as contributors to the country's economy, few women were willing to choose working in kindergartens as a career. Teaching in kindergartens was regarded as 'a lowly, servant's job with no promising future' (Nanjing, 1959). Finding qualified teachers became the most difficult task facing early childhood education. Despite the national emphasis on the importance of early childhood education for children's futures and national development, teachers were difficult to recruit. This lack of qualified teachers and high quality resources was an impediment to the expansion of ECEC in China at this time.

However, the achievement of this decade was set back between the 1960s and the 1970s, the 'Great Leap Forward' (*大跃进*) and the 'Cultural Revolution' (*文化大革命*). During this period, early childhood education was under serious attack

(Corter *et al.*, 2006) due to the accusations that it fostered a new generation of 'bourgeoisie' (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). The goals of kindergarten education were realigned to inculcate revolutionary fervour. Young children in kindergartens were organised and trained as propagandists for 'Mao Zedong Thoughts' (*毛泽东思想*), while almost all the teachers were displaced or forced to find other employment (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), kindergartens were closed and did not reopen fully until 1979.

The year 1979 was in many ways a turning point for early childhood education with a national conference on nursery and kindergarten education held in Beijing (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). The conference aimed i) to develop a coordinated effort on the transition between nursery and kindergarten; ii) to resolve the problem of teachers' low salaries; iii) to provide support to local infrastructure and establish more qualified teachers and improve the health of nursery and kindergarten children; iv) to establish a national set of kindergarten teaching activities (i.e. physical activities, mathematics, language, social knowledge, music and art) (Corter, *et al.*, 2006). In 1981, the government issued new 'Guidelines for Kindergarten Education' (Chinese Preschool Education Research Association, 2003). The new guidelines formally specified moral education (*德育*), cognitive education (*智育*), physical education (*体育*), and aesthetic education (*美育*) as the core curriculum in kindergartens.

After the 13th Chinese Communist Party Meeting in 1983 (*中国共产党第 13 次代表大会*), Chinese early childhood education experienced another nationwide

promotion by policy makers and scholars (Chinese Preschool Education History Compiling Group, 2003). The issue of quality teacher training programmes and the compilation of a curriculum for kindergartens became central issues for implementing nationwide preschool education. Kindergartens, especially the boarding ones in rural areas, were seen as vital institutions in which to deal with the single child's problems emerging from the 'one-child policy' (*独生子女政策*), which will be extensively discussed in Chapter 2.

Since 1983, many efforts have been made within the political constraints to set up a national research conference on early childhood education, to encourage publications and journals of early years education, and to provide practical suggestions on how to teach young children in kindergartens (Chinese Preschool Education History Compiling Group, 2003). Great achievements have been made in the early years education field since the 1980s. Further development of Chinese early years education has been observed because of Chinese economic reform. The economic transformation in Chinese society is regarded as the most influential factor in Chinese early childhood education today (Chinese Preschool Education History Compiling Group, 2003). Consequently, Chinese early childhood education has entered a new era of development in the light of social, political, and economic changes. Western child development theories, teaching methods and the nature/nurture debate have again been translated into Chinese, attracting the attention of Chinese early years educators and policy makers and impacting on Chinese ways of nurturing the younger generation (Chinese Preschool Education History Compiling Group, 2003).

By 1985, the number of kindergartens in China had increased to 172,262 (see the number of kindergartens and children in Table 1-3). Meanwhile, about 15 million children between the ages of three and six were enrolled. However, this expansion in number and size of kindergartens still lagged far behind the demand. There was only a little over 20% of all children between the ages of three and six attending kindergarten (He, 1986).

Table 1-3: Number of kindergartens and children's enrolment from 1980 to 1985

	Kindergartens				Children Enrolled (in 10 thousands)			
	Total	Ed. Dept.	Non Ed.	Com. Dept.	Total	Ed. Dept.	Non Ed.	Com Dept.
1980	170,419	7,495	21,352	141,572	1,150.8	131.3	155.7	863.8
1981	130,296	5,980	22,704	101,612	1,056.2	134.1	171.7	750.4
1982	122,107	6,298	25,199	90,610	1,113.1	151.1	218.2	743.8
1983	136,306	13,174	29,716	93,419	1,140.3	191.8	226.6	721.9
1984	166,526	10,003	30,486	126,037	1,294.7	207.0	250.2	837.5
1985	172,262	11,196	29,794	131,272	1,479.7	153.5	269.9	956.3

Source: State Education Commission, PRC, 1986 (*my translation*)
Com. = community, including municipal and workplace kindergartens

Since the 1990s, the number of kindergartens and children enrolled has increased gradually. From Table 1-4 we can see that, in 1998, there were 180,140 kindergartens with 24,030,300 children enrolled. With increasing enrolment, the number of teachers has increased at the same time. In 1998, there were 955,700 kindergarten teachers, giving a teacher/children ratio of 1:25 (MOE Survey, 1998). However, with the policy of population control in place, the Chinese birth rate has decreased since 1998, which has resulted in a decrease in the number of kindergartens, a drop in child enrolment, and a diminishing number of teachers.

Table 1-4: Number of kindergartens, enrolled children, and teachers in 1949-2004

Years	Number of Kindergartens	Children Enrolment	Number of Teachers	Teachers and Children Ratio
Before 1949	1,301	130,213		
1956	18,500	1,081,000		
1965	19,200	1,713,000		
1983	136,000	11,400,00		
1988	171,845	18,545,300		
1998	180,140	24,030300	955,700	1:25.1
1999	180,110	23,262,600	957,900	1:24.2
2000	175,800	22,441,800	946,500	1:23.7
2001	111,700	20,218,400	630,100	1:32.0
2002	111,800	20,360,200	659,300	1:30.9
2003	116,400	20,040,000	709,100	1:28.3
2004	117,900	20,894,000	718,100	1:29.0

Source: Wu, (1992); MOE Survey (2004); Zhu (2002) (*my translation*)

According to the 2004 MOE educational report, there were 117,900 kindergartens with 20,894,000 children enrolled and 718,100 teachers, giving a teacher/children ratio of 1:29. In recent years, due to the vigorous support and active participation of government at all levels and society at large, China's early years education has developed steadily (Zhu, 2002). Statistics show that by the mid 1980s, only 24% of preschool aged children (3 years old) were enrolled, whereas, the enrolment of preschool aged children had reached 41% by the end of 2004 (Corter, *et al.*, 2006).

Since 1903, Chinese early years education has experienced a century of development in various ways; on the one hand, advocating full participation of society to provide early years education; on the other hand, allowing more

freedom for the private sector to operate kindergartens. Further, the Chinese government also encourages provincial authorities to run kindergartens, and to raise funds through their own efforts thus enabling them to hire teachers in a competitive manner (Xin, 1984, cited in Hawkins, 2000).

In 2001, the Ministry of Education published new guidance for preschool education (Kindergarten Education Guidance (trial basis), 2001, *幼儿园教育指导纲要)*, transferring the administration from the central government to the local governments. In the management structure, the central government develops national policy, while provincial and municipal governments are responsible for making detailed plans for the policy implementation (Corter, *et al.*, 2006). Provincial and municipal governments today have full responsibility for early years education, both in terms of management and finances, which are based on the provincial situation. Furthermore, private kindergartens have emerged due to the central government's encouragement of establishing private education institutions. The privatised kindergarten has become one of the characteristics of contemporary Chinese economic reform.

At present, most Chinese kindergartens are funded by provincial and municipal government, though a strong presence of the private sector, local organisation, and university providers is observed (Zhu, 2002). Although the Chinese government encourages the establishment of different types of early years provision, it has published no standard criteria for private kindergartens in terms of facilities, in-service teacher training, and curriculum organisation (Zhu, 2002). As a result, provision of early years programmes ranges from local government centres (both provincial and municipal sectors), to workplace-based provision, to

private sectors (Corter *et al.*, 2006).

The Chinese 'socialist market' (*有中国特色的社会主义市场经济*, Wong & Pang, 2002; Zhu & Wang, 2005) has played an important role in shaping people's perspectives concerning early years education and care. In particular, it has changed Chinese views towards paying for quality kindergarten programmes. Compared with kindergartens under the planned economy (i.e. kindergarten education was understood as an aspect of socialist welfare, where the government took full responsibility for caring for and educating young children), all kindergartens require parents to pay fees (tuition, accommodation, and food). However, fees vary from kindergarten to kindergarten, from public sector to private sector, from urban to rural areas, and from city to city.

In general, public kindergartens, including provincial, municipal, and workplace provision, only require parents to pay partial fees to cover basic daily maintenance (accommodation and food) and the tuition fees are subsidised as part of occupational benefits for most Chinese parents. However, private kindergartens require parents to pay full fees (tuition, accommodation, and food) which are normally higher than those in public sectors (MOE Survey, 1998; MOE Survey, 2004). A profit-making perspective is embedded in concepts of establishing private provision, which, to a certain extent, shapes the practice of private kindergartens to maximize the pursuit of profits (Zhao, 2001).

Since 1997, the number of private kindergartens has increased and children's enrolment in such provision has increased accordingly (See Table 1-5). Policy for early years education has become more flexible since the new kindergarten

education guidance was issued in 2001. Kindergartens, therefore, are able to choose their own way of kindergarten management on the basis of their experiences when dealing with young children. A detailed examination of the managerial features and curriculum organisations of kindergartens will be presented in a later part of this chapter in order to analyse different kindergarten provision and different curriculum arrangements.

Table 1-5: Number of private kindergartens and children's enrolment, 1997-2002

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total Number of Kindergartens	182,485	181,368	181,136	175,836	111,706	118,000
Number of Private Kindergartens	24,643	30,824	37,020	44,317	44,526	48,400
Percentage	13.5%	16.9%	20.4%	25.2%	39.9%	41%
Total Number of Children in Kindergartens	25,189,600	24,030,400	23,262,600	22,442,000	20,218,000	23,360,200
Number of Children in Private Kindergartens	1,348,830	1,707,810	2,224,282	2,842,600	3,419,310	4,005,200
Percentage	5.4%	7.1%	9.6%	12.7%	16.9%	19.7%

Source: MOE Survey, 2004 (*my translation*)

According to kindergarten education guidance (2001), the local education department supervises the management and finance of province, city, and institutionally funded kindergartens. However, the supervision of private kindergartens does not include financial aspects. Hence, teaching facilities, school environment, and teaching resources provided by the government to public and private kindergartens varies significantly. In order to offer a more attractive service than the public kindergartens, private kindergartens usually make efforts to distinguish themselves from others by offering a variety of teaching and learning programmes and providing children with assessable

learning outcomes. The appeal of private kindergartens is due to the influence of 'market economic' perspectives (Zhao, 2001). Further discussion of these issues in relation to both public and private kindergartens will be carried out in a later part of this chapter.

1.2 General kindergarten programmes for child education

The importance attributed to early childhood education in China has been examined in this chapter. There is a strong conviction that ECEC provides the foundation for a child's future. Moreover, it is a widely accepted view that education can contribute to making a difference in China. The overall aim is to cultivate a well-educated and ambitious generation, who in turn will support China's modernisation process. Consequently, ECEC has become a type of 'sensitive thermometer' (BEIC, 2004) to measure Chinese urban and rural development (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999), the health and wealth of local communities (Dahlberg, *et al.,* 1999), women's liberation, and family planning (BEIC, 2004).

The Chinese ECEC system combines child care with education, ensuring that children achieve all-round moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development, providing them with a harmonious coordination of body and mind, and preparing for their future formal schooling. Health, language learning, science, society, and arts are included in the kindergarten programmes to ensure children's learning outcomes and to prepare them for the next phase of schooling at age 6. Kindergarten education programmes aim to create an atmosphere in which children learn to interact with other children and adults, experience the world around them, and demonstrate both social and learning

abilities.

Chinese early childhood education has been undergoing dramatic changes in recent years related to its conceptualisation, learning, and pedagogy. The issue of raising a so called 'spoiled' generation of single children as a consequence of the one-child policy has long become a concern for the government, educational authorities, teachers, and parents. Kindergarten, therefore, is officially viewed as the major institution for children's socialisation and control/regimentation (*guan,* 管) (BEIC, 2004). Currently, the Chinese early years education provides three different programmes for children aged 3 to 6.

The first, called nursery (*托儿所*), is an 8-hour daily programme for children under 3 years old. For this particular type of programme (nursery), caregivers receive training as nursery nurses rather than teachers. The second type is called kindergarten (*幼儿园*). This 8-hour daily programme is provided for children from 3 to 6 years old. In this type of programme, the class size increases with age, and class sizes range from 20 to 40 children. The third type of programme is called a pre-primary class (*学前班*) for children of 7 years, and is part of the elementary school. This programme is similar to kindergarten, but is often located in schools, and only lasts half a day (i.e. 4-hour provision in the morning). Children attend such programme before they enter year 1 in primary school, and it prepares them to enter formal schooling. These classes usually place greater emphasis on academic subjects, learning outcomes, and use teaching methods similar to those of the Chinese elementary classes (Zhu, 2002; Powell, 2004).

Kindergartens (*幼儿园*), the major provision investigated in this research, are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education at the national level and the Department of Education at the local level (Wu, 1992; Zhu, 2002; Powell, 2004). The programmes and daily schedule for kindergartens are standard throughout the country. Kindergartens are usually divided into three different age groups: the first or 'little' grade (*小班*) for the three- to four-year old children; the second or 'middle' grade (*中班*) for the four- to five-year olds; and the third or 'big' grade (*大班*) for five- to six-year old children (Zhu, 2002; Powell, 2004). A kindergarten's full day programme normally begins at 7.30 a.m. and ends at 5.30 p.m. The daily programmes include formal lessons, with both group and individual activities and outdoor activities (Zhu, 2002; Powell, 2004).

Children aged 3 to 4 have a daily 15-minute-teaching session, and children aged 4 to 5 have a longer teaching session or two sessions of 20 minutes, whereas for children in the upper grade, teaching sessions are even longer. At least two sessions of 30 minutes are considered to be ideal. Health (safety issues), language (speech and Chinese characters), science (the world and nature), mathematics (number, shape, and pattern), society (social and moral), and arts are included in the kindergarten curriculum. In particular, artistic and performance skills in singing and dancing occupy an important place in the curriculum (Zhu, 2002; Powell, 2004).

These different ECEC programmes serve different functions and purposes at the various stages. Normally, the programmes provided for preschool-aged children serve two purposes: childcare and educational preparation (Powell, 2004). For

children under 3, childcare is considered more important than educational goals or preparation for formal schooling. Nurseries for children under 4 years old are mainly concerned with their health and safety (Powell, 2004). Preparation for formal schooling is provided for children over 3 years old.

At present, great emphasis is put on teaching and learning pre-academic skills such as reading, writing, speaking, numeracy, and performing. Kindergartens take responsibility for offering children 'achievement orientated' programmes (Powell, 2004). Influenced by foreign theories of child learning and development, the traditional 'force feeding' teaching and learning has gradually changed (Zhu, 2002). The new 'Kindergarten Education Guidance' issued in 2001 specifies the curriculum contents, aims, and teaching methods for kindergarten practitioners.

1.2a Emphasis on the whole-child development

The Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001) promotes ECEC as vital for all-round achievement. The guidance states that ECEC helps children develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for formal schooling and lifelong learning. In this respect, developing good learning and living habits and attitudes, balancing the development of mind and body, enhancing social skills, mastering language abilities, and understanding the Chinese culture and its traditions are regarded as being at the core of kindergarten education (Zhao, 2001).

Kindergarten education aims to provide children with comprehensive and illuminative teaching and learning activities. Teaching and learning are focused on five areas: (i) health, (ii) language, (iii) science, (iv) society, and (v) arts. Kindergarten education develops children's emotions, attitudes, abilities,

knowledge and skills around these five broad areas (see Table 1-6).

Table 1-6: Preschool education programmes

	Developing Aims	Key Points
3-4 years old	Health Language Science Society Arts	Becoming familiar with everyday kindergarten routines; willingness to talk with teachers and fellow students; can use simple sentences to answer questions; having a sense of curiosity about the world; learning to explore the world; willingness to participate in artistic activities
4-5 years old	Health Language Science Society Arts	Enjoying participating in every day kindergarten life; can interact politely with teachers and fellow students; can express self by using a whole sentence; actively participating in activities; having basic knowledge of numbers, shape, pattern, time, and space; expressing feelings and experiences clearly
5-6 years old	Health Language Science Society Arts	Familiarity with a variety of different environments; talk with others confidently; can concentrate on listening to others; expressing self clearly; having imagination and be willing to learn; participating activities actively; understanding and respecting moral ethics; using various means to express and perform

Source: Kindergarten Education Guidance 2001 (*my translation*)

The Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001) points out that teaching and learning activities should be adapted to children's mental and physical development. Individual children's interests, abilities and experiences should be

taken into consideration when teachers prepare and design the programmes. The guidance also recommends that teachers should use a variety of teaching methods and help children learn through play.

1.2b Early years education provision

There is currently a variety of educational provision for preschool children which provides different types of programmes for children at age 3 to 6. At present, there are four types of kindergartens: provincial, municipal, workplace, and private kindergartens (Zhu, 2002) providing a wide choice of provision for parents of preschoolers. The provincial kindergarten, funded by the provincial government, aims to provide education and care services to the children of their staff including governors, officers, general staff, and so forth. The municipal kindergarten is funded by the city government and provides services to children from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds (Zhu, 2002). Meanwhile, the workplace kindergarten, normally funded by organisations, companies, or universities, focuses on services for children of their staff. The private kindergarten is open to all and provides services for children whose parents believe that higher price leads to better quality.

Despite the different funding provision, most Chinese kindergartens provide similar educational programmes. By and large, there are three types of kindergarten education programmes: (i) traditional Chinese programmes, (ii) Westernised education programmes, and (iii) bilingual education programmes (i.e. English as a second language).

The traditional Chinese programmes provide child education and care

programmes in accordance with Chinese values and perspectives towards children and child development. However, changes have been made since the new kindergarten education guidance (2001). The traditional 'force feeding' approach to teaching has gradually changed to a focus on developing children's potential through 'quality education' (Chen, 2000). As the curriculum is not specified in detail, according to the new 'guidance' (2001) requirement, each kindergarten takes responsibility for choosing teaching methods and resources to devise and deliver teaching and learning programmes.

The 'Westernised' education programmes adopt more flexible teaching and learning styles (Chen, 2000). In recent years, influenced by Western child developmental and learning theories (e.g. Piaget's Constructivism; Vygotsky's Social Constructivism; Montessori methods), some kindergartens combine traditional Chinese child education perspectives with Western influences resulting in new teaching styles and approaches to the curriculum. Some kindergartens set up Montessori programmes in which young children learn from observing and interacting with peers (Beatty, 1995). Based on Montessori's design for kindergarten classes, some kindergartens try to cultivate children's natural love of learning through managing their own individual interests (Beatty, 1995). In general, the Montessori classroom combines six areas for a well-rounded educational experience: practical life, sensorial, maths, language, cultural area, and arts and music.

Bilingual kindergarten education programmes aim to cater for the increasing demand for mastering English language skills (Wong, 1996). With the development of political, economic and trading links with the West, the

importance of English as an international language is widely recognised by the Chinese. English has become one of the most frequently taught subjects for Chinese children. Consequently, English as a second language (ESL) has been adopted in many kindergartens (Zhao, 2001). The combination of English teaching and learning with other learning activities is at the centre of these programmes. However, the effectiveness of such training is debatable, since teachers often use Chinese to teach English. Teaching English as a second language focuses on teaching vocabulary and simple sentences (BEIC, 2004).

In spite of the variety of educational programmes and teaching approaches in Chinese kindergartens, some are under the influence of traditional child education perspectives and affected by the Chinese social, economic, political, and cultural situation. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) claim that most curriculum design and teaching content tend to be nearly the same. With large class sizes and a concentrated curriculum, children's individualised learning, and creative thinking have to give way to a 'one fits all' style of curriculum which stresses conformity to a certain standard and holds everybody to the same pace of learning. The impact of ECEC has affected teachers' perspectives towards child rearing and educating. However, not much effort has been made to understand more fully the theories and practice of ECEC.

1.3 Training for ECEC teachers

The quality of ECEC programmes is determined by the characteristics of the interactions between individual children and the practitioners, the knowledge and skill of practitioners, and the environment created by the practitioners

(NICHD, 2000; National Research Council, 2001). Research evidence (Barnett, 2001; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2001; National Research Council, 2001; Love, Schobert, & Meckstroth, 2002; Sylva *et al.*, 2003) reports consistent and significant associations between higher practitioner education levels, quality programmes, and better outcomes for children. Teachers' preparation and development is also an important aspect of China's education provision. Pre-service teacher training is reported to be carried out on a large scale being both highly efficient and of high quality (MOE Survey, 2004) to improve the quality of kindergarten teachers.

The National Net Alliance on Teacher Training was launched in 1998. This programme aims to develop teacher training through sharing information via internet. By using an integrated system of teacher training, a satellite network and the Internet, it provides continuous support and service to teachers for life-long learning and professional development. Teachers in kindergartens and primary schools receive training and professional development, which has led to a remarkable improvement of teachers' teaching abilities (MOE Survey, 2004).

The Chinese government has made great efforts to improve teachers' social status and welfare policies. In 1985, a landmark was established: September 10th was designated as Teachers' Day and for the first time a day was set up to honour their professional status. At the same time, the Chinese government explicitly stated that 'teachers' average salary shall be equivalent to or higher than that of the civil servants and shall be raised gradually' and 'teachers shall enjoy the same medical care as the civil servants of the localities' (MOE Survey, 2004, p.9).

Teacher training is perhaps the most important issue affecting the implementation of ECEC policy. At present, the teacher training system is developing to meet the needs of the current kindergarten guidelines, for example, Kindergarten Education Guidance issued in 2001 and New Guidance for Kindergarten Management issued in 2004. A teacher qualification and examination system has been set up to improve the quality of teachers (Zhu, 2002). Furthermore, part time and in-service training courses are available, although not compulsory, for kindergarten teachers. At present, there are 67 kindergarten teacher training institutions throughout China to train teachers for different phases of early years education. These training programmes mainly focus on enhancing teachers' abilities in class management, story telling, and in the use of musical instruments.

More recently, teacher-training courses have become increasingly professionalized. Normal universities (*师范大学*) have courses dedicated to teacher training, which offer not only basic training for the initial qualification but also higher degrees such as Masters and PhD. Teacher training and professional development are recognised by more and more kindergartens as a way of improving ECEC implementation and practices.

By and large, most kindergarten teachers have attended three years of teacher training courses (*幼师*) after junior high schools. Graduating from such courses enables them to become kindergarten teachers.

Table 1-7: Education background of head teachers and teachers in 2002

Total		Education Background				
		Graduate	Undergraduate	Diploma	Certificate	High School graduates
Total	659,268	552	19,305	224,776	373,893	40,742
Head teachers	88,041	339	6,038	34,430	42,710	4,524
Full-time Teachers	571,227	213	13,267	190,346	33,183	36,218
Urban	290,600	446	13,271	126,403	140,168	10,312
Head teachers	37,111	283	4,081	17,819	13,606	1,322
Full-time Teachers	253,489	163	9,190	108,584	126,562	8,990
Town	226,148	93	4,711	69,671	137,726	13,947
Head teachers	29,034	47	1,441	10,595	15,426	1,525
Full-time Teachers	197,114	46	3,270	59,076	122,300	12,422
Rural	142,520	13	1,323	28,702	95,999	16,483
Head teachers	21,896	9	516	6,016	13,678	1,677
Full-time Teachers	120,624	4	807	22,686	82,321	14,806

Source: Corter *et al.,* 2006

According to 2002 data (see Table 1-7), there were 903,319 kindergarten teachers, staff, and workers in the whole country (not including substitute teachers and part-time teachers), of which 53% were graduates of pre-school education programmes. There were 76,040 substitute teachers and part-time teachers, of which 43% were graduates of preschool education programmes. Sixty-nine percent of principals and full-time teachers were graduates of preschool education programmes. There were 659,268 kindergarten teachers (only including full-time teachers and principals) in the whole country, of which 2.9% had a postgraduate degree, 34% had a bachelor degree, 57% were graduated from preschool education programme (college diploma), and 6% were high school graduates (UNESCO, 2003).

Salaries for kindergarten teachers are generally low; however, their responsibilities are high compared with primary and secondary teachers (Zhu, 2002). On average, a kindergarten teacher's expected salary is 1000 *yuan* (元) to 1500 *yuan* (equivalent to £70-100) per month, while the salary for a foreign company staff member can be as high as 8000 *yuan* (equivalent to £600). Most kindergarten teachers take responsibility for teaching the curriculum, taking care of children at all times, organising indoor and outdoor activities, writing teaching plans, and dealing with parents. Therefore, being a kindergarten teacher is a demanding job. Long working hours, high levels of demand to teach and care for young children, high pressures to ensure children's safety, and low salaries make the job unappealing. Strict requirements for children's safety from both kindergartens and parents tend to restrict classroom activities. In addition, the large class size (average 35 children) reduces the interaction between the teacher and the individual child.

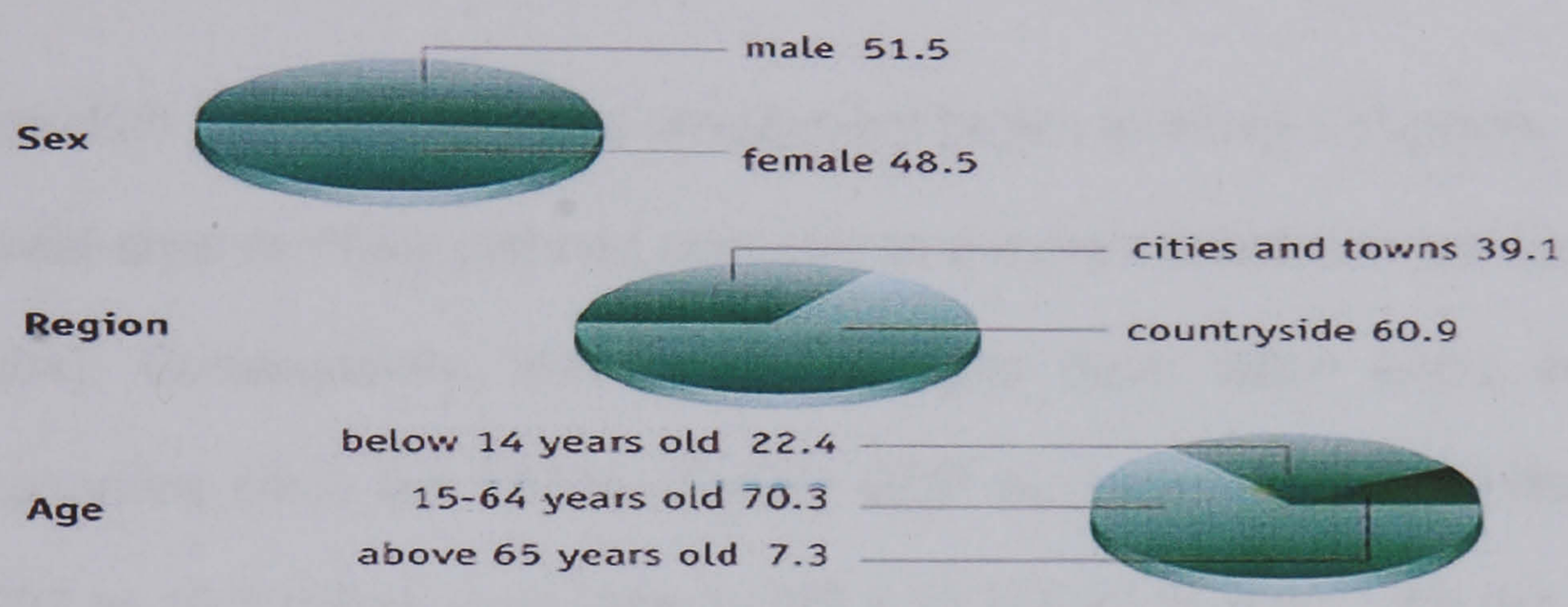
1.4 Issues hindering Chinese ECEC development

Although there has been much progress in ECEC in China since the 1980s, there are still issues restricting its development. In this section, a discussion of problems facing ECEC development is addressed: (i) population density and (ii) the impact of social, political, and economic transformation on ECEC.

China is a united multi-ethnic nation of 56 ethnic groups (CTAL, 2004). According to the 2002 census, China's population was more than 1.28453 billion (see Figure 1-2), which does not include citizens living in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions and Taiwan Province (CTAL, 2004). In

2004, the annual rate of population growth was 12.98 per 1000 (CIA, 2004), whereas, the annual death rate is 6.92 per 1000 (CIA, 2004). The population control goal of the country is that the growth rate does not exceed 9 per 1000 and by 2005 the population is controlled to less than 1.33 billion (CTAL, 2004).

Figure 1-2: Chinese population composition



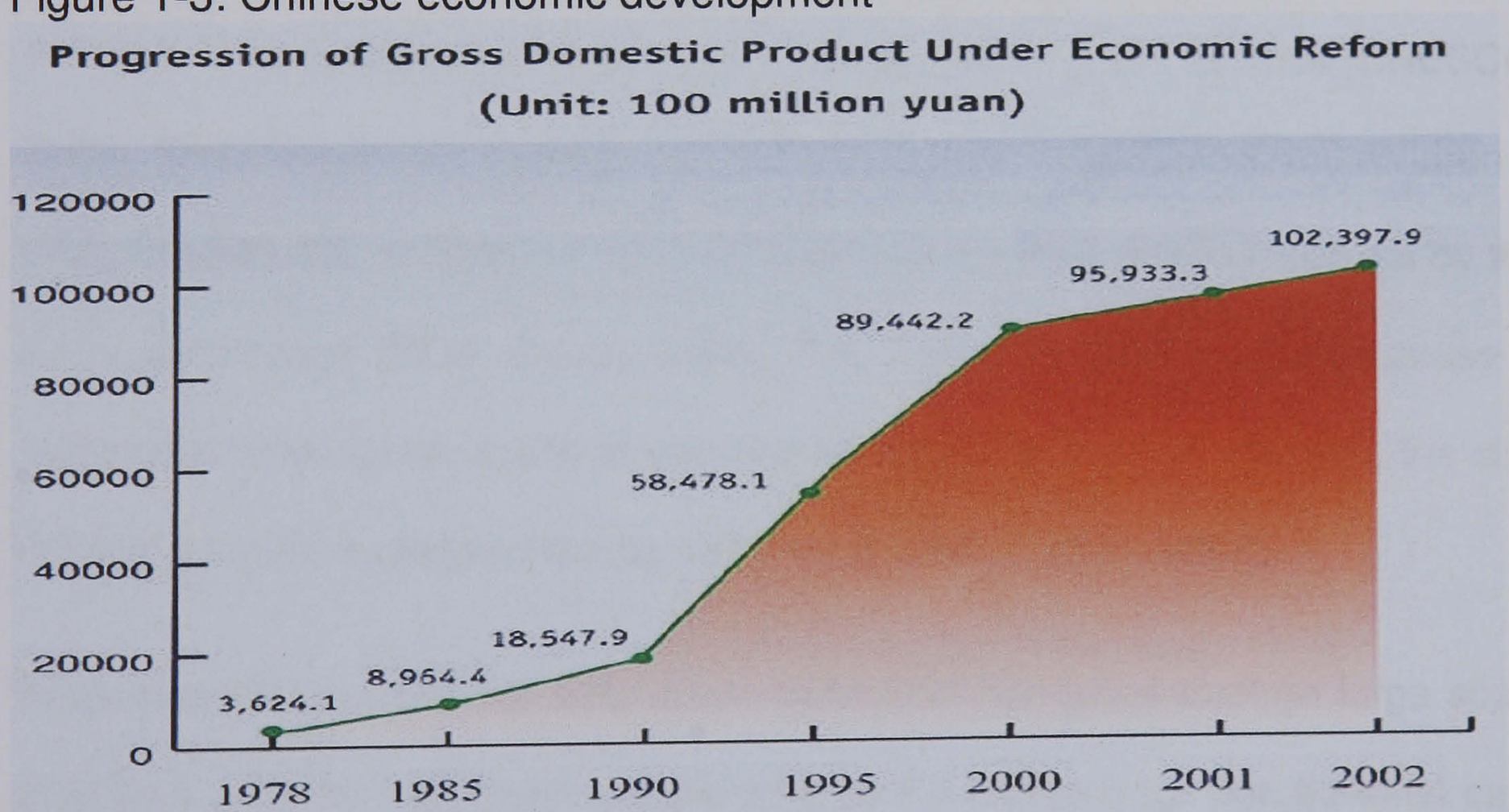
Source: CTAL: China in Brief 2003

Population control has therefore become one of China's key priorities. In particular, since the 1970s, the Chinese family structure has changed dramatically. The one child policy, for example, attempts to restrict every Chinese couple to only one child (Vaughan, 2004). This child, therefore, is treated as the treasure of the parents and grandparents (Vaughan, 2004). Parents try to provide for their children as best their resources will allow. In return, parents want their offspring to be successful in the future. Chinese people regard education as a 'stepping stone' to success and children – the only child in the family – are under special pressure to excel in school (Chen & Liu, 2000). Children's academic achievement is regarded as one of the factors which may ensure a bright future (Chen & Liu, 2000). Although a child is the treasure of the

family, the child is expected to work hard so as not to disappoint the family. Children, from as young as preschool age (3 years old), are already expected to study for future success. As the perspective of future success has been widely accepted, Chinese ECEC is expected to produce high achieving children who should have the drive and ability to compete to ensure their future success (Chen & Liu, 2000).

From late 1978, the Chinese government began to move a sluggish, inefficient, Soviet-style centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented system (CIA, 2004). Consequently, tremendous changes have taken place in Chinese economics since the 1970s. China's GDP increased from 7.4 trillion *yuan* in 1997 to 10.2 trillion *yuan* (about US$ 1.23 trillion) in 2002, with the per-capita GDP reaching US$ 1,000 (see Figure 1-3).

Figure 1-3: Chinese economic development



Source: CTAL: China in Brief 2003

After more than two decades of reform, China's development remains one of the

most dynamic in the world (Chinese Human Development Report, 2002). The development of the Chinese economy has had a great impact on Chinese education. Early childhood education, as a yardstick of economic development in various areas (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999) and as a condition of a healthy and wealthy society (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999), has been given increasing attention by the Chinese government. It is reported that approximately 20 million 0 to 3 year old children are in nurseries and another 20 million 3 to 6 years olds are in kindergartens (UNESCO, 2003; Corter, *et al.*, 2006). This yields a generous estimate of roughly 38.5% of children aged 0 to 6 in formal ECEC arrangements (UNESCO, 2003, Corter, *et al.*, 2006).

Due to the decline in the birth rate, the number of kindergartens also decreased between 1995 and 2003 (i.e. 180,438 kindergartens in 1995; 116,390 kindergartens in 2003), particularly, in the five-year period from 1999 (i.e. 181,136 kindergartens) to 2003 with a percentage decline of 36% (UNESCO, 2003). Enrolments also decreased in the same period (i.e. 27,112,000 children in 1995; 23,263,000 children in 1999; 20,039,000 children in 2003) but not by the same percentage (MOE Survey, 2004). The difference between the decrease in number of kindergartens and in enrolments suggests that, on average, the size of kindergartens increased during this period (Corter, *et al.*, 2006).

Since the 1970s, Chinese early years education has gone through large scale change due to its insufficient contribution to the demand for non-parental care enhanced by the new economic system (Hawkins, 2000). The Chinese government, therefore, focused on linking child care and education services to economic reforms by increasing early childhood provision (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999;

Hawkins, 2000). The government proposed the goal of increasing early years provision through creating more places for young children aged 3 to 6 (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999; Hawkins, 2000; CTAL, 2004). In this sense, funding for early years education has grown significantly over the past four decades. It is observed that financial allocations for early years education by the central and local governments need to be secured in order to establish quality care and education programmes for each child (Information Office of State Council, 1996).

Great emphasis has been placed on the development of Chinese early years education since the 1980s. The Chinese government has not only supported the development of care and education services financially, but also has given it legal state protection (MOE survey, 2004). The legal constitution is one of the most important milestones for Chinese democratisation (Zhu, 2002). Most importantly, educational laws have great impact on education policies, education institutes, school management, educators and children (Chen, 1993; Wu, 1996; Zhang, 1997).

The education laws related to ECEC serve to protect young children's rights and to improve ECEC quality. In particular, the Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001) emphasises the importance of early childhood education for the development of the whole child. Besides the Kindergarten Education Guidance, the Chinese government has passed general laws and regulations for early childhood education (see Table 1-8). These laws regulate kindergarten management, curriculum, and teacher training, providing a legal framework for both state and private kindergartens.

The Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001), which regulates early childhood

education, is part of Chinese basic education and sees it as the foundation stage of school education and lifelong learning. It states that kindergarten programmes should respect different stages of children's intellectual and physical development (Chen, 2000).

Table 1-8: Chinese early childhood education laws and regulations

Name	Time
Education Law of PRC	18/03/1995
Statutes of Kindergarten Management	01/02/1990
Kindergarten Regulations	09/03/1996
Kindergarten Education Guidance	15/08/2001
New Guidance for Kindergarten Management	01/04/2004

Source: MOE Survey, 1998; MOE Survey, 2004 (*my translation*)

Chinese cultural, social, and political transformation before and after 1949 and recent economic development has worked together to shape Chinese early years policy and programmes as we see them today. Since China opened up its boundaries in the late 1970s, Western values have had a great influence on the concept of early years education. Therefore, it is useful to place the examination of the development of Chinese ECEC in a broader context, looking at research carried out in Western countries, where effectiveness and quality of ECEC programmes have been emphasised. The concept of quality and effectiveness of ECEC programmes varies across countries. The assumption of quality and effective provision is therefore based on the understanding of the child, childhood, the purpose of child education, and childrearing perspectives.

Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) suggest the evaluation of quality of ECEC programmes involves a three-part measure: structural, process, and outcome quality. The structural criteria of ECEC programmes, such as kindergarten teachers'

education and professional training, teacher-child ratio, and group size, are key factors in process quality (Ruopp *et al.*, 1979; Vandell, 2004), which, according to Dahlberg *et al.* (1999), refers to what happens in early years provision and interactions among children, teachers, parents, and early years sectors. In addition, process quality is the key factor which determines the effects of child achievement through ECEC programmes. Outcome quality is related to child achievement concerning young children's later school, social and economic performance in adulthood. With the concept of paying for high quality education, parental satisfaction with early years services has gradually become the core of outcome criteria.

While the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project, a government funded research project in the UK, has demonstrated the beneficial effects of high quality provision on children's intellectual and social/behavioural development measured at primary school entry as well as at the end of Years I and 2 of primary school (Sylva, *et al.*, 2003), it further suggests i) pre-school experience enhances all-round development in children; ii) there are significant differences between individual pre-school settings and their impact on children; iii) high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children; iv) home learning is important for children's intellectual and social development.

Chinese ECEC programmes provide unique child care and education provision for children from 0 to 6. The examination of ECEC implementation and practice cannot merely adopt Western concepts of quality and effectiveness. However, it is understood in this research that the investigation of ECEC policy and

implementation should consider Chinese social, economic, political, and cultural impacts on the view of children and childhood. However, the discussion of quality and effectiveness of ECEC provision in the Western context helps to understand the concept of Chinese early years education because there are considerable similarities between Chinese and Western provision to the contribution of children's short- and long-term outcomes.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive framework to describe the development and theoretical tenets of Chinese early years education through reviewing relevant research and discussing issues affecting the recent development of Chinese ECEC. It is believed that the analysis of the general issues embedded in the development of Chinese early childhood education will provide a foundation to underpin this research. In that sense, this chapter aimed to outline the starting points from which this study was designed and generated.

This chapter began by exploring discourses of Chinese early years education through engaging with issues related to the development of ECEC theories and policy. This review chapter further provided a substantive account and discussion on areas such as the developmental history of Chinese ECEC, the Chinese child education perspectives, programmes available for children, the teachers' training, the impact of economic transformation on early childhood education, and the Western perspective of quality and effectiveness of ECEC programmes which have influenced the understanding of Chinese ECEC policy

implementation and practice.

The chapter included an extensive review of the research and historical documentation on ECEC, which have informed debate on ECEC as well as Chinese viewpoints of child education. Having considered the existing studies on Chinese early years education, this chapter informs the rationale for the choice of research methodologies employed in this study. This chapter has provided the background information and the theoretical framework for the present study.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter theorises how perspectives on children, childhood, and children's education are constructed in a society like China, which is currently experiencing profound social, economic, and political transformations. It further engages with how such construction impacts on current ECEC by shaping daily practice. In so doing, the chapter theorises the perspectives and debates on ECEC in the light of traditional Chinese cultural values and modern perspectives affected by cultural changes and social transformation in contemporary China.

China is a society known for its great emphasis on education and learning. For centuries, education has been regarded as a means for the nation's wellbeing as well as a ladder for people's upward mobility (Fong, 2004). In particular, ECEC is regarded as being at the core of China's educational policies for social and economic development (UNESCO, 2004). Consequently, great importance is given to ECEC by Chinese educational authorities, early years practitioners, and parents.

Chinese early childhood education principles are built on traditional Chinese child-rearing methods, which provide certain culturally based views and understandings of early learning, the value of play, and the success attached to learning achievement (Zhao, 1992a). Traditionally, Chinese people believe that children's experiences greatly influence their learning outcomes (Tobin, *et al.*, 1989), therefore, teachers and parents feel highly responsible for shaping children's learning experiences through providing appropriate teaching and learning activities (Zhao, 1992b).

Recently, Chinese early years education principles have expanded beyond the traditional perspectives and have developed into a new concept with frequent references to Western child education perspectives, as discussed previously in Chapter 1. In this sense, the contemporary Chinese early childhood education system is built upon both traditional Chinese values of child nurturing and Western influences. However, due to the strong influence of traditional Chinese cultural values towards children and education, Chinese people form their own understanding of and perspectives on child education, which are very different from Western views.

As a Chinese researcher studying in a Western context, my personal experiences with both Chinese and Western cultures largely determine how I position myself when explaining Chinese cultural perspectives. In general, my Chinese and Western knowledge has enabled me to step back to examine the original 'taken for granted' Chinese contexts. By adopting different viewpoints towards the same contexts, I constantly deconstructed my original ways of thinking and reconstructed my understanding. As a result, it is necessary to explain the whole process of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Therefore, in this chapter, theorising Chinese early childhood education builds on deconstructing (Derrida, 1997; 2002) traditional Chinese perspectives of learning, playing, and achieving. In so doing, it aims to critically reflect on the original Chinese understanding of children, child development, and child education. It further reconceptualises (Cannella, 2005) the perspectives in line with social, economic, and political transformation in contemporary China. Through deconstructing and reconstructing Chinese perspectives on child

education, this chapter builds up a framework for the study where Chinese social and cultural contexts generate or perpetuate (Cannella, 2005) Chinese beliefs and understandings of early years education. However, it is important to realise that the so-called benefit (Cannella, 2005) of Western perspectives cannot be directly applied to Chinese settings. For example, findings of the EPPE project (e.g. that preschool settings where staff have higher qualifications show higher quality of teaching and learning outcomes, Sylva, *et al.*, 2004), will not be used to evaluate Chinese preschool practices.

In order to explain ways that Chinese people deal with young children and their education as well as their perspectives towards young children's education, the centre of the critique will firstly engage with traditional Chinese perspectives of learning and achieving, the role of parents and their involvement, and child education within 'the shadow of Confucianism' (Bai, 2005). Once such interrogation is built up, it will then move to reconstructing the original Chinese perspectives within current social, economic, and political transformations and the impact of Western values and influences on current practice in early years settings.

2.1 Deconstructing traditional Chinese perspectives of child education

For centuries, Chinese culture has been known for its emphasis on the value of education and learning (Wu, 1996). Education is considered as important by Chinese people from different perspectives (Lee, 1996). Firstly, for most Chinese people, education is associated with personal development which relates to the Confucian notion (*儒家思想*) of human perfectibility. Secondly, education is

regarded as vital for becoming part of the elite and giving access to upward mobility that is especially relevant in a competitive society like China. Finally, education plays an important role in the nation's prosperity.

As Chinese people value education as a means of personal perfection and social mobility, from a very young age, Chinese children are encouraged to take part in various educational activities in order to realise their ultimate goal of being successful in the future. Therefore, receiving a good education is considered as a central goal from the start of a child's life (Chen & Liu, 2000). In that sense, education aims to shape ordinary children into 'ideal children' (Bai, 2005) with Chinese norms and with potential for success. By and large, Chinese education is associated with formal learning, which is a process of 'studying extensively, inquiring carefully, pondering thoroughly, sifting clearly, and praising earnestly' (Lee, 1996).

Kindergarten, the main setting where early learning experiences take place, is therefore regarded as a place for formal learning rather than a place for fun (Wu, 1996). Serious teaching and learning of words, numbers, story telling, drawing, and singing and dancing becomes the centre of parental expectations for what kindergarten education entails (Wu, 1996). Due to their understanding of early learning as a long term 'investment' (Field, 1991) for children's future success, Chinese parents consider that early academic achievement is essential from which children could benefit when entering formal schooling (Wu, 1996). In turn, kindergartens make great efforts to provide children with programmes promoting such achievements to meet parental and societal expectations of kindergarten education.

Therefore, two concepts appear to be the guiding principles (Jiang, 1985). The concepts of controlling (*guan,* 管) and inculcating (*jiao,* 教) are employed by Chinese kindergarten teachers to fulfil parental expectations of learning achievement (Zhu, 2002). For Chinese people, regimentation and control (管) are key element of educational concepts (Tobin *et al.*, 1989), which are accepted as a desirable means of dealing with young children. Although the word '*guan*' literally means 'to govern', which in Western ECEC may not appear to be developmentally appropriate, for Chinese, '*guan*' (管) has a very positive connotation (Wu, 1996), which is synonymous with caring. To a large extent, kindergartens use the idea of '*guan*' (管) to shape children's behaviours in accordance with Chinese norms (Zhu, 2002). Through controlling children's behaviours, Chinese kindergarten therefore inculcates (教) knowledge in young children through various teaching and learning activities (Zhao, 2001).

By and large, Chinese perspectives towards learning and playing greatly shape their ways of nurturing young children (Liu, 2000c). For the Chinese, learning is considered as serious, whereas playing is seen as rather informal and just for relaxation and amusement (Bai, 2005). As a result of their very contrasting perspective towards play from that of Western models, Chinese people always argue that play, to some extent, can divert young children from their goals and waste their energy (Bai, 2005), which will ultimately lead to failure to learn. On the basis of this argument, Chinese early years practitioners tend to prefer the use of more formal teaching methods and less play based activities (Liu, 2000b).

Chinese parents, on the one hand, share similar beliefs about play and learning

as those of early years practitioners. On the other hand, they tend to place considerable emphasis on their children's learning outcomes (Wu, 1996). Parents wish for their children to be 'a dragon' (*望子成龙*) because traditionally in China only emperors can call themselves dragons, who embody the 'soul' of a dynasty; in the current context, it means that they have high aspirations for their children. They want them to be outstanding and successful (Ho, 1986); this may best explain why Chinese parents tend to adopt a more authoritarian parenting style than those in other societies (Chen, Hastings, Rubin, Chen, Cen, & Stewart, 1998). Chinese parents feel highly responsible for their children's learning; hence, they become actively involved in children's learning to ensure their offspring develop the necessary sense of competitiveness in both education and work (Wu, 1996).

In general, Chinese parenting styles tend to be high in control and restrictiveness (Chen, in press). Similar to Chinese kindergarten practitioners, parents use control (管) to regiment their young children (Chao, 1994) in order to ensure their children's learning outcomes. In this sense, regimentation and control can be seen as a means of showing 'care' and 'love' towards children (Wu, 1996). Control and regimentation are thus synonymous with parental concern and care, through which Chinese parents may constantly monitor their children's learning outcomes. Such an understanding of parental involvement has largely structured parents' behaviours when dealing with children's learning.

Moreover, Chinese people also believe in the interconnection between hard work and achievement. In this respect, it is understood that achievement is always possible through constant hard work (Yan, 2000) and effort.

Consequently, parents and teachers place great emphasis on children's hard work. In line with this Chinese perspective, parents and teachers use children's effort, willpower and concentration as a measure of how much has been devoted to learning for success (Chao, 1994). Although Chinese people accept the existence of differences in innate endowment among human beings, there is still a strong belief that failure is a result of not working hard enough (Fen, 2002).

Kindergarten practice, including teaching, learning, and play activities, is largely shaped by these expectations of success which affect children's learning styles. Both Chinese parents and kindergarten practitioners place a strong value on children's formal learning from a very young age (Chao, 1994). As a result, the classroom environment in a Chinese kindergarten may generally appear to be a very formal one compared with those in Western settings (Chen & Liu, 2000). For example, children are required to sit quietly and to answer questions one by one when called upon by the teacher (Chen & Liu, 2000). Although the activity-based approach has significantly changed classroom practice in many kindergartens, young Chinese children still have fewer opportunities to play freely in kindergartens (Chen, 2000) than children in Western settings.

A plausible explanation for those perspectives, deeply embedded in Chinese beliefs of child education and development, is that the cultural heritage, especially traditional Chinese cultural values rooted in Confucian doctrines, has shaped Chinese behaviours into what we see today (Yan, 2000). Confucius (孔子), the most influential philosopher in Chinese culture, has had a great impact on shaping Chinese culture, thoughts, and behaviours (Creel, 1954). Most importantly, Confucian doctrines have greatly influenced the ways Chinese

nurture young children. Thus, understanding his ideas is the key to understanding Chinese culture and education (Creel, 1954). Furthermore, through analysing Confucius' ideas of education, many significant insights can be obtained into the development of the modern education system, especially in connection with the Chinese approach to child rearing and education.

Confucius exerted a great influence on Chinese beliefs about human nature, social harmony, moral virtues, human relations, and education for human perfection (Yan, 2000; Bai, 2006a; 2007). In general, Confucius believed that 'by nature human beings are alike and it is through education they become far apart' (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E). Therefore, education from a very young age is understood as essential to perfect human nature and to build up children's ability to enable them to become useful and successful when they become adults (Mao, 2002). In line with Confucius' ideas, Chinese children at the age of 3 or 4 are starting to engage with various learning opportunities (e.g. learning to play musical instruments, to draw pictures, to dance, and to write Chinese calligraphy) to improve their human nature and to prepare for the future. Kindergarten, as the major sector of early years, is expected to provide young children with essential knowledge and experiences (Kinney, 1995).

As a humanist, Confucius emphasised that the perfection of human nature is a means of constructing an ideal society with harmonious human and governmental relations (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E). On the one hand, Confucius believed that the individual is an essential part of a society and could not exist separately from the society. Every person is a basic unit in pursuit of the perfect virtue for the good of family, society, and the nation (Mao, 2002). On the other

hand, he believed that the individual is very considerably shaped by society since the society is nothing more than the interactions of individuals (Yan, 2000). As a result, education is essential for pursuing the perfection of human nature, which is believed to be the foundation of an ideal society.

With such reciprocal understanding, Confucius further emphasised the importance of the moral virtues of human beings (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E) for an ideal society. In line with Confucius' argument, the pursuit of ideal human virtues is one of the central themes of education (Yan, 2000). Basically, Confucius believed in the perfectibility of all mankind, which means that regardless of social status and ethnicity, appropriate education can enable any one to become a 'gentleman' (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E) with perfect moral virtues. Once again, Confucius stressed the importance of education for the pursuit of moral virtues.

Among all the moral virtues required by Confucius in the pursuit of perfection, he regarded respect as vital to constructing harmonious human relations (Yan, 2000). Respect, according to Confucius, governs harmonious human relations. A son would necessarily respect his older brothers, his mother, his father, and his teachers. Older people, including parents and teachers, would control and help their children. Consequently, individuals should, to a very considerable extent, respect such harmonious relationships in society (Fung, 1976; Bai, 2006a) and act towards each other in an appropriate way (Chan, 2004). Nevertheless, social order and harmony are maintained by every member of society who is aware of their requirements and responsibilities.

To a great extent, Chinese people regard collectivism as a major means to

achieve social harmony (Yan, 2000; Bai, 2006a). Consequently, they are socialised to believe that the national good takes priority over individual interests (Yan, 2000). Indeed, when a conflict between an individual and a group occurs, people are encouraged to abandon their personal concerns and emotions to pursue the harmony and benefit of the group (Yan, 2000; Bai, 2006a). Individuals, both children and adults, are not encouraged to celebrate their uniqueness or express their personal feelings and opinions.

From an educational perspective, the pursuit of harmony is to ensure a harmonious relationship among children, parents, and teachers on the basis of the argument of 'letting the ruler be a ruler, the father a father, the son a son' (King & Bond, 1985). Traditionally, teachers have been regarded as having unchallengeable authority and always deserve a high status. Parents and children tend to respect teachers and always try to avoid offending them by giving negative responses, criticisms or complaints (Simpson, 1987). In this respect, it is easy to understand why Chinese parents and teachers tend to develop an authoritarian attitude to child-rearing (Mao, 2002). Children, therefore, are expected to respect their parents and teachers (Yan, 2000). As they accept the idea that parents and teachers are always right, Chinese children consequently accept their ideas without question (Chen, 2000).

In addition to respectful and collective perspectives, Confucius believed that benevolence, the starting point of developing and performing other 'moral virtues', is the love and empathy one has towards others. Accordingly, benevolence enables other moral virtues such as 'respect', which is the virtue one has in order to maintain harmonious human relations; 'righteousness' which

is the virtue one should have for justice; and 'propriety' which balances human relations and social orderliness (Yan, 2000). The way to obtain these moral virtues, according to Confucius, is to maintain harmonious human relations through constructing a balance between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger, and teachers and pupils (Mao, 2002).

In accordance with this concept, a harmonious family is the foundation on which to build a harmonious society (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E, *修身，齐家，治国，平天下*). It is believed that only by obtaining such moral qualities and performing all aspects accordingly can the connection between every member of the society be strengthened, and the orderliness of the society be achieved (Yan, 2000). The pursuit of human perfection, by maintaining social and human harmonious relations, and striving for the moral virtues of Confucian philosophy, underpins the general attitude towards education (Fen, 2002).

In Confucius' argument, 'education' has two dimensions: formal education and self improvement (Fen, 2002). Children are expected to accomplish the perfection of human virtues through self improvement with the assistance of formal acquisition of knowledge (Fen, 2002). The importance of formal learning, therefore, is re-emphasised. Learning, for Confucius, is seen to be the holistic development of human character which develops and cultivates both mentally and morally to expand, strengthen, and discipline (Creel, 1954; Bai, 2007). In addition, the idea of harmonious human relations and social orderliness is emphasised and runs through all educational activities (Fen, 2002).

Today, Confucian ideas towards education still exert an influence on Chinese

people (Bai, 2007). The perfection of human nature through education has always been emphasised and influenced Chinese forms of education (Fen, 2002). In this respect, from a very young age, Chinese children are expected to follow traditional Chinese norms including respecting teachers, parents, and elders, working hard in order to achieve, and balancing the interwoven relationship between the individual and the collective (Yan, 2000).

In particular, the balance between the individual and the collective is at the centre of focus (Bai, 2006a). Children are expected to be modest and to keep a low profile (Yan, 2000). They are not encouraged to celebrate their uniqueness or express their feelings and opinions (Fen, 2002). Moreover, Chinese children are also expected to sacrifice their individuality to fulfil the collective harmony and needs and to pass on such collectivist values to the next generation (Bai, 2006a). In other words, when conflict occurs between an individual and the nation, people are encouraged to abandon their personal concerns and emotions for the sake of the harmony and for the benefit of the nation (Yan, 2000; Bai, 2006a).

Such cultural features not only shape Chinese characteristics but have also had a deep impact on the pattern of Chinese education from ancient times to the present. As a result, the ideas of conformity, harmony, and collectivism (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) always underpin Chinese education regardless of the great changes that have occurred in Chinese society over thousands of years of civilisation. Teachers tend to keep all children learning at the same pace and give less importance to children's individual development. Moreover, children's individualised learning has to give way to the 'one style fits all'

(Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) approach to teaching and learning.

Confucius extended his approach to early childhood education along the same line as his general views of education. According to Confucius, the education of young children aims to shape children into 'small beings' with well-established moral virtues. Childish behaviours and activities, such as playing, laughing, jumping, and running, are not appreciated (Bai, 2005), whereas a young but mature (*少年老成*) child is always preferred as an example of a 'good' child (Bai, 2005). A precocious (i.e. well-brought up) child, according to Confucius, is characterised as quiet and meditative and with the ability to be self-cultivating. It is believed that there is an interconnection between a 'little adult' in childhood and a successful person in adulthood (Bai, 2005).

On the basis of Confucian doctrines, orthodox Chinese education for children, to a large extent, aims to create 'an ideal child' (Bai, 2005) who differs from the ordinary child in particular ways: such an ideal child is characterised by a sedate appearance and a strong dislike of play, which will guide children's behaviour throughout the education process. More importantly, this idea is prevalent in Chinese society and even today the image of a quiet and precocious child is held up as an example for children in current society.

Generally speaking, the education of young children in Confucian doctrines aims to create children with moral virtues and lofty ideas who have the ability for self cultivation and improvement (Fen, 2002). Most importantly, the moral development of young children underpins the concept of whole child education in Confucianism. It is argued by Confucius that education that ignores the moral

perfection of a child is of little worth and is usually unable to produce the 'holistically developed child', consequently is unable to produce children who can take their place as happy and useful members of society (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E).

Although Confucius has exerted considerable impact on shaping Chinese perspectives towards children, childhood, and child education, it is worth pointing out that Confucian doctrine has a very gendered point of view towards educating males and females. In Confucius' time, only men could be citizens while women were affiliated to men and were not included in social plans (Li, 2003). However, this view of male and female has changed since the foundation of the People's Republic of China. In China, gender issues are not understood as Western feminist views. On the one hand, the Chinese government has promoted equal rights and opportunities for women to engage with learning, working, and other social activities. According to the socialist concept, women consist of half of the society (*妇女能顶半边天*). On the other hand, the one child policy has not only restricted Chinese couples to have only one child but also enhanced the equal opportunity for Chinese girls (Fong, 2004). As the only hope for the family, girls generally are treated the same as boys.

Today in China, girls are as likely to attend ECEC programmes as boys (Bartlett, Arnold & Sapkota, 2003; South Asia Education Sector, the World Bank, 2003). Girls' participation in early childhood education programmes increases their likelihood of enrolment and grade completion in basic education (Bartlett, Arnold & Sapkota, 2003). Under such circumstances, Chinese ECEC appears to be successful in overcoming gender bias (Corter *et al.*, 2006). It is reported by Ross

(2004) that gross enrolment rate (GER) for boys and girls aged 3 to 6 years old was similar in 2003. However, some suggestion of gender bias is still found in China (Short & Sun, 2004). In addition, Ross (2004) suggests that illiteracy and lack of education are concentrated among Chinese women and girls in poor counties. Although research findings (Ross, 2004; Short & Sun, 2004) reveal possible gender bias in low-income families, there are no systematic data to determine whether other localised gender disparities exist in Chinese society (Corter, *et al.*, 2006).

To sum up, in this part of the chapter, a detailed discussion of traditional Chinese cultural values underpinning current child education has been presented to examine child education through understanding the embedded Chinese perspectives on the child, childhood, and child education and development. Furthermore, the discussion of Confucian perspectives on human nature, social and human relations, general education, and child education suggests that current early childhood education concepts are shaped by general Confucian ideas. However, over thousands years of development and changes, traditional Chinese perspectives towards the child, childhood, and education/development have evolved greatly. Therefore, the need to reconceptualise or reconstruct Chinese ECEC taking into account the influence of contemporary social, economic, and political transformation is perceived. Thus, the next part of this chapter will mainly focus on the discussion of contemporary issues and the extent to which they have contributed to redefining the ECEC field.

2.2 Reconstructing Chinese early childhood education

China has gone through tremendous social, economic, and political changes

since the late 1970s. Among other things, the one child policy (*独生子女政策*, 1979) has exerted a major influence on changing Chinese perspectives towards child education and future success. By and large, the only child is the only hope of the family (Fong, 2004; Bai, 2006a; 2007). Indeed, the demand for early intervention has increased as a result of the social restructuring resulting from the one child policy (Zhu, 2002).

Generally speaking, the one child policy has limited each newly formed family to having only one child. This policy has been given a high national priority and much of the nation's resources and attention have been devoted to increasing the number of one-child families (Falbo, Poston, & Feng, 1996). The goal was to reduce the rate of population growth so that China's population would be about 1.2 billion at the beginning of the 21st century (Banister, 1987). In particular, the subsidiary aim of this policy was to create a generation of ambitious, well-educated children who would lead their country into the First World (Fong, 2004).

As a result of the one child policy, the vast majority of Chinese youth born after 1979 are singletons. The child, thus, is treated as the treasure of the parents and grandparents (Chen, in press). Parents, following Confucian values, take particular care of their children, and also take total control of them and their future. On the one hand, a considerable parental investment, in functional and social terms, has been spent on the single child to ensure the provision of appropriate living standards and educational opportunities (Chen & Kaspar, in press). On the other hand, the 'only child' indeed receives the full attention of his/her parents, who believe that their parental efforts can ensure their child will

outperform other children in school and be competitive enough in the future to guarantee them access to a higher level of education (Wu, 1996) and thus social mobility.

Consequently, the child, indulged by as many as six doting adults, is likely to come to think of himself or herself as 'a little sun' or, little 'emperor' of the family (Tobin, *et al.,* 1989). The '4-2-1 syndrome': four grandparents and two parents pouring their attention onto one child, has begun to be seen as a serious problem in the current society within this one-child policy (Chen, in press). In that sense, the idea that only children are more easily spoiled has raised concerns among Chinese educators (Wu, 1996). Consequently, there is widespread discussion within the national discourse about the fear that children in one-child families are in danger of being spoiled by their parents and grandparents, which may lead to undesirable social and economic consequences (Wu, 1983; 1985; 1992).

In response to the risk of spoiling only children, Chinese authorities and experts have promoted preschools as a solution to deal with these only children's common problems (Tobin, *et al.*, 1989). According to many Chinese parents, kindergartens provide single children with the necessary experiences of collective life, as well as being a corrective to their less desirable habits and behaviour. Parents appear to believe that through kindergarten education, children can be trained to be more group-orientated, less self-centred, more orderly and obedient and more altruistic (Tobin, *et al.,* 1989).

Since it is widely accepted that early years education is the foundation of a child's future, great efforts are made to ensure that kindergartens provide

academically orientated education programmes and high quality care. Under such circumstances, teachers are expected to use various teaching and learning methods to organise class activities, through which children can excel (Chen, 2000). Moreover, kindergartens also need to ensure that there are sufficient facilities for teachers to prepare their lessons and impart knowledge (Liu, 2000a). It is the kindergarten's responsibility to provide an orderly environment which enables children to concentrate on learning and to ensure positive learning outcomes (Chen & Liu, 2000).

Although learning achievement has long been emphasised in Chinese culture, the one child policy further strengthens such a goal in a major way. Compared to children born between the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese single children born now are under considerable pressure to be part of an elite group (Fong, 2004). Before the 1970s, it was not essential for a child to become part of an elite group because social inequalities between elite and non-elite groups were smaller in the political economy of socialism (Fong, 2004). In addition, a child did not necessarily need to have a well-paid job, since the cost of supporting parents in their old age would be shared by many siblings, and support among siblings would be relied upon in hard times. Thus, competition for reaching the top in education and work was not nearly as intense in the last three decades as it is currently (Fong, 2004).

However, contemporary economic reform in China has resulted in great social changes in Chinese society, and consequently striving for the top has become essential. As a result, Chinese only children are strongly socialised to have high expectations and educational aspirations (Fong, 2004). In particular, they face

unusually high levels of parental pressure and competition for success in the education system and the job market. From a very young age, these children face intense pressure from parental expectation, peer competition, and academic demands. They spend much of their time on both academic and non-academic subjects that are believed to be ways of improving their future achievements in education and work (Luo & Gilliard, 2006).

It has become common practice for children to attend after-school tuition to keep up with the high standard of academic demands. From 3 years old, these children have less time to experience the type of childhood considered in the West as typical of 'being children' (Corsaro, 1997) because of their lack of autonomy and opportunities for free play. In addition, children have to spend as much time as they can on studying. They are controlled and nurtured under the watchful eyes of their parents and teachers (Corsaro, 1997). In accordance with their parents' belief in the importance of effort in order to reach the higher levels of attainment, parents consistently set high standards for their children and spend a large amount of time supervising and assisting their children's learning. This high level of parental involvement in children's learning is closely related to the Chinese people's concern for '*face*' (my emphasis, *面子*). Losing face (*丢脸*) or gaining face (*争气*) concerns not only the person directly involved but also reflects on the whole family (Luo & Gilliard, 2006).

Chinese only children are therefore socialised to strive to reach the top, both in education and work. In addition to being the centre of parental attention, love and pride, only children, in turn, are expected to be the main source of their parents' post-retirement income, paying for medical and nursing care (Fong,

2004). Due to the current inequalities in China's present social structure, only a high level (well-paid) job can supply sufficient income to enable one person to fulfil the obligation of support for children, parents, and parents-in-law. Individual financial success, therefore, becomes one of the goals which is sought in a transforming society like China. Academic achievement is perceived as the only way to secure a better life for Chinese children and for their families. Thus, being successful in the future places an intense burden on Chinese children to succeed academically.

The widespread pressure of only children's aspirations to reach the top consequently produces rapid diploma inflation and fierce competition in the educational system and the job market (Fong, 2004). Hence, parental investment, attention, and constant monitoring of children's aspirations have consistently been applied to provide every possible advantage in the race to become elite and thus realising the 'Confucian ideal'. If only children lose out in the competition for socioeconomic status, their parents will have no other children to fall back on, and a single child who falls into poverty will have no siblings to turn to for help (Fong, 2004).

As well as responding to the one child policy, early childhood education has been highly influenced by the modernisation of the Chinese economy (Zhu, 2002). On the one hand, this modern economy allows women to join the workforce and work long hours away from home. On the other hand, it also creates a competitive job market for the female workforce which requires non-parental child care for young children (Chen, 2000). Economic development has, therefore, resulted in an increased demand for childcare services. Moreover,

the concern for an early academic start and future career success has caused many Chinese children to face a concentrated dose of both economic and emotional investment (Fong, 2004).

Since the late 1970s, economic reform has gradually expanded into the areas of education, culture, and politics in China (Chen, in press). At present, as the market-oriented economy flourishes, the egalitarianism that underpinned the planned economy from 1950 through the 1970s is gradually declining (The Economist, 2006). The new economic model has triggered a massive redistribution of wealth. Chinese perspectives relating to values, materials, money-making and education have also changed dramatically. While individual intelligence and diligence matter greatly in defining who gets what, a person's access to political and economic power is even more fundamental (The Economist, 2006). Indeed, the demand for education has been further increased as a result of social and economic restructuring (Zhu, 2002).

The development of the Chinese economy has had a great impact on Chinese education, and, reciprocally, education works alongside economic development as the key to sustainable development, peace, and stability. This is so, in other rapidly developing countries, and thus is an indispensable means for effective participation in the world economic order of this new century. After more than two decades of reform, China's development is seen to be one of the most dynamic in the world (Chinese Human Development Report, 2002). It is in this context that Chinese early years education, using Chairman Mao's famous saying, has spread from 'sparks' into 'a prairie of fire' (*星星之火可以燎原*).

Traditionally in China, businessmen were ranked below government officials, scholars and peasants in social status (Li, 2003). Chinese people commonly thought that businessmen were sleazy and selfish who made money through cheating and exploitation of the poor. The notion was reinforced during the regime of Chairman Mao when material motivation was despised (Creel, 1954). Since the decades of economic reform and opening-up the boundary, the social and economic changes have radically transformed traditional values. In turn, Chinese people are becoming highly enthusiastic about money making (The Economist, 2006). This is also seen as the criterion for spouse selection and the judgement of a person's worth, once based on political criteria, is now increasingly inclined toward wealth and money (The Economist, 2006).

In such an atmosphere, Chinese people appear to believe in the value of education for its essential role in realising a person's potential for financial success. Firstly, they believe that receiving a good education gives the best start in life. Such a view of education always reflects the Confucian emphases that educational achievement has always led to higher social status in China (Ke Ju Zhi Du, 2002). Secondly, for most Chinese people, education is associated with the capacity to be competitive in a society where success is very highly valued. A good education can therefore be instrumental in empowering self potential and achieving economic interests. Finally, attached to the value of education, Chinese people regard being educated as the most fundamental aspect in the acquisition of social prestige (Zhu, 2002). Thus, early childhood education seems to be fundamental in underpinning the realisation of all such perspectives.

As the foundation of the Chinese education system, early childhood education is believed to provide children with a holistic development and to safeguard their basic needs for health, safety and learning (Zhu, 2002). Being regarded as a long-term investment, a high quality early childhood education can result in a good preparation for a child's future learning. Just as important, Chinese early childhood education is associated with communist ideology and social reform of the status of women and their social roles (Zhao, 2001). According to the communist ideology, women were liberated and allowed to participate actively and equally with men in productive activities (Zhao, 2001). Therefore, ECEC provision helps relieve women of the chores of child care and allows them to join men in the work force.

In this way, Chinese early childhood education has developed dramatically since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Great efforts have been made to provide high quality training programmes for teachers, compiling a curriculum for kindergartens, holding national research conferences for early years professionals, and setting up consultation centres to offer practical suggestions regarding child rearing and nurturing to both teachers and parents. Influenced by economic reforms, modernisation and increasing access to the rest of the world, Chinese early childhood education has developed in a new direction where a combination of traditional Chinese child rearing and modern child developmental theories are now being highly valued.

In summary, Chinese ECEC is reconceptualised by positioning early years education within the boundaries of a profound social, economic, and political transformation. Through the discussion of the impact of such a transformation,

the Chinese perspective on child education and development is reconceptualised and built up on the basis of an evolving understanding of the child and childhood in current China. The discussion of Chinese economic development and social changes provides the structural factors within which current ECEC implementation and practice are situated.

Conclusion

China distinguishes itself in the world by its long history, its rich culture, its varied population, and its concern with the role of education. In particular, education has long been regarded as vital for civilised development and for ensuring that individuals can adapt to difficulties they may face in life. Consequently, the Chinese word for education, *jiao-yu* (*教育*), can be used to elucidate its roots deep in Chinese culture, and to offer an understanding of the meaning of education in the traditional sense within modern China.

The first symbol (*jiao*) can be defined as 'to guide, to teach, or to educate'; whereas the second word (*yu*) can be understood as 'to nurture, to lead or to nourish' (Zhao, 2001). Hence, the educational process of teaching and learning means the transference of knowledge from one generation to the next, and the development of new ideas through a thorough understanding and use of that knowledge. In modern China, education also means to bring about personal enrichment and development, social harmony, and a skilled labour force, which can meet the challenges of national development with its necessary social, political and economical changes.

In this chapter, Chinese early years education has been examined through

deconstructing it from traditional Chinese cultural values including Chinese perspectives on children, childhood, and child education/development. How Confucian doctrines have helped to shape Chinese beliefs towards child education has been explained. This understanding of how Chinese culture is embedded in ECEC provides a structure to fully engage with relevant theoretical insights to determine the appropriate methods of enquiry into the real settings. Moreover, the discussion of ECEC has also taken account of contemporary social, economic, and political transformations in Chinese society. In so doing, further understanding of Chinese child, childhood, and child education has been put forward. Through such analysis, the discussion of social transformation has built up a comprehensive picture in which the current context of ECEC is situated and given meaning.

This chapter has presented a theoretical framework for the study through deconstructing and reconceptualising Chinese ECEC. It has provided an opportunity to critically engage with traditional Chinese culture and current changes in society. It is believed that this provides the framework on which the data collected in this study can be understood and given meaning.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of the research based on the discussion of the background literature and the theoretical framework presented in previous chapters. This chapter will begin with the research questions to identify the overall objective on which the current research was designed and conducted. There follows an examination of the research design to explain the rationale for the choice of research methods. On the basis of the clarification of research objectives and paradigm, an explanation of the methodological framework then follows in which the multiple case study is discussed. In this part of the discussion, issues in relation to the selection of samples, the instruments, and the research procedure are included. Special attention is given to the analytical strategies used to deal with the research data in order to explain how the data were processed, analysed and given meaning. Finally, the discussion of validity and reliability, cultural issues, ethical issues, and the role of the researcher are also included to underpin the conduct of the research.

This chapter includes the research questions, the design, and the methodology of the study. The overall aim of the research was to understand how Chinese ECEC policy is translated and implemented at the practical level. This includes developing a detailed understanding of policy and practice as well as the extent to which the policy is implemented. In exploring implementation, kindergarten head teachers', teachers', and parents' perspectives on current ECEC and the

extent to which their perceptions impact on practice were also central to this enquiry.

This research combined a quantitative and qualitative approach to investigate the topic. The research process consisted of a two-phase investigation: phase one examined the implementation of ECEC policy in terms of curriculum organisation, teachers' in-service training, class activities, and parental involvement in four kindergartens representing both public and private provision. The intention was to build up a comprehensive picture of the implementation of policy and to identify issues embedded in the processes of translating policy into practice. A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect relevant data. While generating quantitative information, the questionnaire survey also provided qualitative data by seeking the views of respondents on ECEC and its changes.

Phase two involved the examination of four individual kindergartens through multiple case study (Stake, 2005). The multiple case study used in this study allowed the researcher not only to employ different methods within the data collection process (Dooley, 2002) but also to explore similarities and differences of everyday practice of each kindergarten (Zach, 2006). In this respect, detailed scrutiny was carried out on the basis of data collected through the questionnaire survey in the first stage of the research. Following this, documentation, first stage observations, interviews, and second stage observations were conducted in a sample of four kindergartens. The documentation covered issues of present general management and implementation in each case study kindergarten, while initial observations focused on general classroom activities. The semi-structured interviews aimed to revisit critical issues identified by the questionnaire survey

as well as to examine respondents' perceptions of ECEC policy and their practice. At the same time, a second phase of observations aimed to triangulate what respondents, especially teachers, said, with what they actually did in the real settings.

3.1 Research questions

It is necessary to re-address the research questions of the current study in this part of the section so that the general research objective can be clearly identified. The overall research aim is to investigate current ECEC policy implementation and practice in the changing social context of China. The study addressed the question of how is Chinese ECEC policy understood, translated, and put into practice in early years settings and to what extent do contextual factors influence the implementation of ECEC policy? Such a research question arises from the need to focus on early years provision in kindergartens, because kindergartens are perceived in the policy as the place where child education and care programmes are carried out, but policy discourse does not deal with how practitioners implement policy in practice and how parents perceive the practice of kindergarten teachers and children's activities.

In this study, three subsidiary questions were addressed to answer the central research question. In so doing, a detailed explanation in terms of how the policy is implemented in the practical level, why the national ECEC policy is shaped in the way as observed in this study, and how practitioners and parents understand the implementation of the policy will be presented.

1. What contextual factors have shaped Chinese ECEC policy?

2. What factors have influenced the implementation of policy at the practical level in Jiangxi Province?

3. What are the general attitudes and perceptions towards policy implementation at the practical level particularly in Jiangxi Province?

The study was designed on the basis of the research questions. The multiple case study, aiming at interpreting the actual implementation and practice in Chinese context, provided a rigorous approach for collecting and analysing data (Zach, 2006). On the one hand, it enhanced research validity (Dooley, 2002) by allowing multiple methods to collect relevant data; on the other hand, it allowed the researcher to identify either similar or different everyday practice in each kindergarten (Lee, 2003). It is argued by Lee (2003) that the use of multiple case study is helpful to produce similar or contrasting information which could be explained through predictable reasons. In the following sections, a detailed explanation of the research design, the pilot study, and the field work will be presented.

3.2 Doing postmodern research in Chinese context

In the previous chapters, the researcher explained the use of a postmodern perspective in this study. Doing postmodern research in the Chinese context not only provided opportunities of making meanings by examining the discourses emerging in the process of policy to practice but also allowed the researcher to present her own 'voice'. In the following section, a detailed discussion will be carried out to explain how postmodern perspectives have impacted on researching in a context where traditional 'universal truths' (Dahlberg, *et al.*,

1999, p.23) have rarely been challenged.

It is argued in this study that there is 'no absolute' (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999, p.23) model of policy to practice that can be directly used to interpret the implementation and practice in Chinese ECEC settings. It further argued that the implementation of policy from macro to micro level was constructed on the basis of both traditional Chinese cultural values and the contemporary transformation in Chinese society. The actual implementation and everyday practice, in this sense, are 'socially constructed' (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999, p.23).

This study aimed to give meanings to the process of policy implementation and to interpret it within Chinese construction which, as Lather (1991) points out, is created by Chinese early years practitioners whose values and beliefs considerably impact on their practices. In addition, this study challenged the idea of 'single truths' (Mac Naughton, 2005) in terms how ECEC policy is perceived and put into practice. It further prompted diverse views and multiple voices (i.e. parents, practitioners, and head teachers) (Mac Naughton, 2005) on the same process of policy to practice. In so doing, 'voices' of different stakeholders were listened to and this was considered as vital for this study.

As previously discussed, the investigation of policy to practice aimed to construct 'meanings' from practitioners and parents and to seek for multiple perspectives within the ECEC context. In this respect, the positionality adopted by the researcher based on her personal perspectives and understandings of Chinese cultural background were taken into consideration when designed and conducted the study.

First, personal perspectives of the researcher mainly related to positioning herself in the research as well as 'voicing' her evolved understandings of the issues under consideration. As pointed out in the Introduction, the researcher's original Chinese way of thinking and looking at the world has greatly shifted to a mix of both 'hybrid' Chinese and Western perspectives since the start of her Western learning experience. Guided by Western perspectives, the researcher began to be 'critical and reflective' (Mac Naughton, 2005). In other words, she began questioning the original 'taken for granted' Chinese truths in relation to child rearing and early education. However, her Chinese perspectives, to some extents, have structured such critical and reflective attempts within Chinese context, which are characterised by specific 'regime of truth' (Mac Naughton, 2005, p.30). In this case, the understanding of an ideology that governs child rearing, early education, and the implementation of policy. Consequently, the researcher not only re-visited her views but also re-thought the process of policy to practice to further make meanings to the rationale of certain behaviours observed in the process, in the light of Chinese perspectives of children rearing and early education.

Second, Chinese cultural perspectives also greatly impacted the conduct of the study. As previously discussed, Chinese people has created a specific 'regime of truth' in the light of traditional cultural values and the contemporary transformation of the country, hence, the society. In this sense, Chinese early years practitioners have specific understandings in terms what requires to be done and how it should be done (Gore, 1993) in the process of policy to practice. Their knowledge of the policy directly reflects in practice through their

behaviours and accounts of events. As a result, this study attempted to examine the discourse of practices within the kindergarten settings and further to compare it with the discourse of policy. By doing so, the study aimed to disentangle certain behaviours observed in the early years context.

3.3 Research design to study Chinese ECEC

On the basis of explaining the researcher's epistemological views towards the study, this section explains the planning and implementation of the research design to study Chinese ECEC. This is accomplished alongside the examination of issues arising through the research process. Miles & Huberman (1994a) argued the need for clarity on the side of the researcher when planning the process. Hence, it is important to select a suitable research methodology to study ECEC in the Chinese context which will serve the purpose of shedding light on an area of research of which little is known. The purpose of the present study was to understand the processes of policy implementation and participants' perspectives. With such a goal in mind, it is necessary to adopt a research approach to investigate real settings and further examine the discourses embedded in these settings (Zach, 2006). The multiple case study, therefore, was employed to identify similarities and differences across each kindergarten.

In this study, a qualitative approach, to gather participants' own language, was adopted on the basis of the argument that 'qualitative researchers study events in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.3).

However, a qualitative research approach may appear as lacking quantifiable facts (Silverman, 2000) due to the nature of the research design. As the main purpose of this research is to identify issues of ECEC through examining practice and understanding which may influence the implementation of policy at the practical level, it is important to present reliable findings based on a systematic investigation of issues embedded in implementation processes. Thus, a systematic investigation involved collecting reliable data through various methods, conducting detailed analysis, and eliciting valid findings from systematic analyses. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was considered to be most appropriate in this context.

3.3a Examining the qualitative approach to studying Chinese ECEC

In order to understand how Chinese ECEC policy is implemented and the ways in which early years head teachers, teachers, and parents perceive early years education, qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed through multiple case study which facilitated the process of triangulation. Adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches has contributed to making sense of essence and contents of discourses in the data and approaches to theories of knowledge used in the study.

The original research plan consisted of a qualitative approach to investigate not only policy and practice in early years settings but also discourses contained in the language of the respondents' (head teachers, teachers, and parents) perceptions and beliefs. However, the perceived disadvantages of conducting a qualitative investigation resulted in modifications to the research strategy. One

apparent disadvantage, taking the characteristics and dynamics of the research into consideration, is the limitation of generalisation on the basis of data collected through the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach has been criticised for failing to serve the purpose of policy-making and improving practice (Hammersley, 2000, Silverman, 2000). Silverman (2000) also points out the inability of a qualitative approach to provide hard and quick answers. Meanwhile, its validity, reliability, and quality have also been the focus of critiques, and it has been characterised as contradictory and hesitant (Tooley & Darby, 1998).

In this study, the researcher attempted to explicate how Chinese ECEC policy is implemented and how kindergarten practitioners and parents understand and construct ECEC. The use of a solely qualitative approach for researching head teachers', teachers', and parents' perspectives of ECEC policy would have been suitable if the research had only sought to identify opinions and attitudes (Lloyd-Jones, 2003). Given that the study is also concerned with the actual implementation of ECEC policy in practice and aims to influence and improve practice, the use of a solely qualitative approach is not sufficient for this research.

The problem of generalisation (Zach, 2006) from qualitative research is also relevant here. The qualitative approach aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of practice in one province (Jiangxi province) in China; it cannot be claimed that the results obtained will be easily transferable to other regions. However, it is important to note that the focus of this study was on understanding the implementation and practice in the early years settings (Van Mannen, 1990) and not necessarily on transferring results to other regions (Zach, 2006).

Recognising this problem of generalisation, it was decided to employ more objective data to include information collected through a quantitative approach. This would enhance the data collected through the purely qualitative approach as 'the qualitative investigation can clear the ground for the quantitative – and the quantitative be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode' (Pring, 2000, p.55).

3.3b Making choices: adopting a combined qualitative and quantitative approach

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to improve its validity, reliability, and quality. Although qualitative and quantitative research approaches are often seen as two opposite ends of the spectrum (Pring, 2000), the employment of a 'mixed-method design' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.19) in this research is an attempt to collect multiple data using different approaches and techniques (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thus, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches has enhanced the exploration of Chinese ECEC policy and its practice as well as of participants' perspectives, understandings, beliefs, and values (see Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: The research design

Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches	Objectives	Instrument
Quantitative Investigation	· Collecting general information about kindergarten practitioners' and parents' perspectives, understanding, and beliefs towards ECEC policy · Investigating how kindergarten practitioners translate such ECEC policy into daily practice · Focusing on information related to training, curriculum arrangements, and parental involvement	Questionnaire survey
Qualitative Investigation	· Collecting ECEC policy documents and teachers' relevant information · Looking closely at classroom activities · Focusing specially on issues generated from questionnaires and observations · Seeking for evidence of consistency between what they said and what they did	1. Documentation 2. Unstructured observation (two phases) 3. Semi-structured interview

This adjustment of the research strategy has resulted in the restructuring of the methodology and the research plan. In terms of the methodological adjustment, the multiple case study was conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The conduct of quantitative investigation aimed to quantify data in the multiple case study (Lee, 2003); while the qualitative investigation provided a detailed account of the practice, the teaching activities, the participants' perceptions, and the processes of implementation (Stake, 2005).

The reassessment was also needed to readdress the questionnaire design and interview questions. A series of closed questions was designed to obtain general information in relation to teachers' and parents' perceptions of early years education; to provide quantifiable results, and to support qualitative meaning making. As this research focused not only on participants' perspectives of ECEC policy, but also on the actual implementation of policy at the practical level, the employment of both questionnaire survey and interviews generated information from different angles. Most importantly, the interviews were conducted after the questionnaire survey and the first phase of observations, so that issues that arose from the questionnaires and observations could be further investigated through a series of questions, which might uncover more information than a questionnaire (Anderson, 1990).

The use of a questionnaire survey also addresses concerns about researching in the Chinese context. In Chinese society, people tend to give 'polite answers' when they think it is appropriate. Therefore, the use of closed questions with pre-coded choices of answers was designed to minimise these cultural effects. The employment of a questionnaire survey, observations, and interviews were intended to gain a more complete picture of Chinese respondents' viewpoints and reactions to the topic (Yan, 2000). The researcher finally decided to utilise four major techniques: documentary analysis, questionnaires to teachers and parents, observations of classroom sessions and class based activities and interviews with head teachers, teachers, and parents.

3.3c Investigating Chinese ECEC implementation through multiple case study

The multiple case study design of this study allowed the researcher to explore the early years settings through replication of the findings across four different kindergartens (Yin, 1994; Lee, 2003). According to Yin (1994), replication is carried out in two stages: a literal replication stage and a theoretical replication stage. In this study, the literal replication stage related to identifying similar everyday practice across each kindergarten; while the theoretical replication stage explained how and why particular differences were identified across each kindergarten (Lee, 2003). In addition, the multiple case study enabled 'analytical generalisation' (Yin, 1994, p.46) through replication of the findings in different kindergartens. It is argued in this study that if all or most of the kindergartens provide similar patterns of practice, a substantial generalisation can be developed to describe the general practice in Jiangxi province.

In this study, the multiple case study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative investigations. The quantitative investigation aimed to quantify the data, whereas qualitative research provided detailed descriptions of each kindergarten (Krathwohl, 1993). According to Pring (2005, p.55), the qualitative approach helps to clear the ground for quantitative investigation, while 'the quantitative can be suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretive mode'. It is important to note that the multiple case study allowed the researcher to identify possible patterns of policy implementation and practice within the data and to explore those patterns through comparison.

The quantitative and qualitative design of this study (the first stage, see Table

3-2) utilised quantitative information collected through a questionnaire survey. Information about curriculum management, teaching philosophy, teachers' professional development, parental involvement, classroom arrangement, monitoring children's achievement, and transition into primary schools within early years education settings was generated from questionnaires in order to provide the foundation for further investigation. Critical issues were identified from the questionnaire survey which provided foci for the qualitative investigation (the second stage) in the four kindergartens. Generally, the second stage of the research (the main part of the field work) focused on investigating the settings through observing, listening, and talking to relevant people. Finally, qualitative analysis was carried out to examine the findings which will be further discussed in a later section.

Table 3-2: Qualitative and quantitative research methods

Quantitative Research	→	Qualitative Research	→	Qualitative Analysis
Questionnaire Survey		Observations & Interviews		Inspection of Data

Source: from Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.4

The research characteristics, relevant research strategy, type of data to be collected, and research duration (Layder, 1993) were taken into consideration when choosing research methods. Layder's research map (1993), which, in this research, referred to context (policy at the macro level), setting (each selected kindergarten), situated social activity (activities in each kindergarten), and self (each individual participants), provided useful structure of the data analysis. In this respect, the units of analysis are: i) the selected kindergartens where the empirical study were carried out; ii) the whole sample of teachers and parents

who were involved in the questionnaire survey; iii) the individual teachers who were observed; and iv) the individual head teachers, teachers, and parents who participated in the interviews.

As a result, the multiple case study, with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was employed to investigate what happens in the four settings where current Chinese ECEC policy is put into practice. It examines why the implementation has been shaped with reference to the practitioners' and parents' perceptions as well as the consideration of national and local social and economic factors. The selection of the multiple case study method was largely determined by the nature of the questions this research sought to answer, since the multiple case study was designed to understand a particular setting (i.e. selected kindergartens) through an enquiry into its actual situation (Yin, 1994).

This study was designed to interpret themes emerging from settings studied (Stake, 1994) rather than generalising to a broader understanding. The interpretation was firstly to present how ECEC policy was put into practice at the practical level and then further explain the implementation and practice through insights of practitioners and parents' perspectives towards ECEC. As Yin (1994) indicates, when selecting a research strategy, the most important preliminary consideration is to identify the research questions in advance. Therefore, the multiple case study strategy for this research was used to answer questions related to 'how' and 'why' the ECEC policy had been implemented in particular ways (Yin, 1994).

The multiple case study, a 'comprehensive research strategy' (Yin, 1994, p.13), offered the opportunity to investigate behaviours and thoughts in the most

natural and in-depth way. In the current study, the multiple case study strategy was employed to investigate four settings where ECEC policy has been implemented. It further enquired into people within the settings by giving 'voice' to them (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999). The multiple case study approach also provided a unique opportunity to understand the specific context (Cohen & Manion, 1994) in which the implementation of policy was situated. It was also important to understand practitioners' perceptions and beliefs about early years education in order to understand their behaviours when implementing policy. The broader picture of the national and local context was also taken into consideration when interpreting the research findings.

In this research, the multiple case study acted as an umbrella term in which a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed. By conducting a case study, the researcher aimed to examine discourses, beliefs, practices, dynamics, and perspectives of ECEC in China. At the initial stage of this study, it was decided that the research would focus on practitioners' understandings of policy and practice. Consequently, a qualitative approach was employed to collect empirical data. However, the decision to use only qualitative research methods was modified due to a concern over possible bias. According to Yin (1994), some case study investigators using only a qualitative approach tend to bias the findings or conclusions through their own subjectivity, which distorts the reliability and validity of the data as well as the authenticity of the conclusions. Therefore, to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the study, a questionnaire survey of teachers and parents was firstly conducted to generate an overall understanding of the settings. From this general perspective of the ECEC sector,

a further enquiry into the sample of private and public kindergartens was carried out in order to get detailed data about implementation, practices, and perceptions.

The advantages of the multiple case study approach are that it is strong in reality and recognises complexity through describing what happens in the real setting (Adelman, 1980). In this research, the investigation of ECEC policy implementation was only based on one province, which imposes a considerable limitation in terms of generalisation. However, the combination of quantitative data and the multiple case study information provided opportunities to identify similarities and differences in terms of policy implementation and practice. With such understandings, this research started from a broader perspective and it further focused down to investigate each case specifically (Layder, 1993). The questionnaire survey aimed to establish the main features, generate overall information, and pull out critical issues for further scrutiny. Meanwhile, on the basis of the data, the investigation of each case study kindergarten was carried out in order to answer the research questions presented in the introduction.

Once the research strategy was determined, a pilot study was conducted to test the research design, the approaches, and the instruments. In the following section, an explanation of the pilot study will be presented.

3.4 Pilot study

The pilot study was intended to trial the instruments of the research. In order to establish the link between the research questions and technique for data collection (questionnaire, interviews, and observations), the pilot study was

carried out in one local kindergarten in Jiangxi Province. Five respondents, three kindergarten teachers in each year group and two parents participated to pilot the questionnaires. Their answers suggested that the contents of each section were generally clear but there were two questions which were difficult to understand. As the questionnaires were first designed in English and then translated into Chinese, the pilot made apparent that further explanation of each section was needed.

The pilot study also included two interviews (one semi-structured and one structured) and a class observation. One semi-structured interview was conducted in a very casual way. It was tape recorded and lasted about 40 minutes. A more structured interview was carried out immediately after the first one. This interview was not taped but detailed notes were taken. Unlike the first interview, the second one was more formal in style, due to the use of a structured format. The whole conversation lasted only 14 minutes. Consequently, a semi-structured interview was considered as the more appropriate technique for the current study. It appeared that the semi-structured interview was more beneficial by encouraging the respondents to speak and express their ideas while the researcher still remained in control of the topics.

The observation was conducted in a classroom of 3-4 year olds. The researcher tried to sit beside the children and took notes. Throughout this session, a number of children asked about the purpose of the researcher in the classroom and what the researcher was writing about. The pilot observation suggested that the researcher's presence in the classroom was likely to influence young children's behaviours as they were curious about the presence of a stranger in

their class. This also affected the teachers' behaviour, as the class teacher had to spend more time on keeping the children concentrating on the activities. It was necessary for the children to get to know the researcher and get used to her presence in the classroom. As observed, it was also important to sit at the back of the classroom and keep a considerable distance from children to avoid disturbing the activities.

The pilot study contributed to exploring certain aspects of the data collection and clarified strategies for making the process more accurate and reliable:

1. The intention of each questionnaire section needed to be explained so that they could be more easily understood;

2. The researcher needed to make sure that teachers and children became used to her being there and so that they were not distracted by her presence;

3. The interview needed to be taped and to be carried out in a generally relaxed way using a semi-structured approach to ask questions;

4. Consideration of the relationship between the researcher and respondents (including children) was essential.

3.5 The conduct of the main study

The section explains the process of conducting the current study through critically engaging with issues of selecting the sample, the choice of research instruments, the design, and finally, a consideration of issues hindering the data collection process.

3.5a The selection of the sample

The selection of the kindergartens was based on the researcher's awareness of the range of diversity among different regions and social and economic contexts. Every effort was made to find kindergartens that were appropriate for this study. The researcher accepted that in affluent areas, kindergartens can be very different from those in poor areas in terms of resources, facilities, as well as kindergarten management, as extensively described in Chapter 1. In addition, the researcher was also aware of the differences between public kindergartens and private kindergartens. In order to select appropriate kindergartens which were both representative on the one hand and comparable to each other in terms of organisational features, funds, curriculum, and socio-economic backgrounds on the other hand, some preliminary criteria were determined. Kindergartens with different sources of funding, and the same enrolment age for children (only kindergartens with children aged between 3 and 6) were involved in this study.

The selection of kindergartens was based on both aspects affecting provision such as organisational features (e.g. sources of funding) and geographical aspects. Publicly funded kindergartens including provincial and municipal kindergartens and a university kindergarten were selected for the study. In addition, one private kindergarten was also included.

Kindergarten 1 (K1) is a workplace kindergarten attached to Jiangxi Normal University which provides services to university professors and staff. Kindergarten 2 (K2) is a municipal kindergarten which is famous for its artistic

activities with children. Kindergarten 3 (K3) is a long established provincial kindergarten attached to Jiangxi provincial government. It is one of the biggest kindergartens in Jiangxi province and provides services for the children of government officials. Kindergarten 4 (K4) is a private kindergarten, whose main aim is to operate for profit. As discussed in chapter 1, these are the four types of kindergartens (provincial, municipal, workplace, and private) in China. The selection of these four kindergartens represented the main Chinese preschool sectors. Through investigation of these four kindergartens, the main features of current Chinese ECEC could be described and analysed.

However, the selection of kindergartens was the first difficulty that the researcher encountered, due to the bureaucratic and conservative attitudes in China. Each kindergarten seemed to be uncomfortable with the idea of i) being closely scrutinised by an outsider who is studying in a foreign country; and ii) the idea that research findings would be presented in an academic publication. As a result, the task of selection became very difficult in terms of finding appropriate kindergartens through the researcher's own efforts. Consequently, the researcher was assisted in the task of seeking appropriate kindergartens by people who had connections with various kindergartens. Nevertheless, the selection of kindergartens was still based on the pre-determined criteria such as sources of funding and kindergarten location in order to make comparisons in the later stage of the analysis.

Selection procedure

When selecting a kindergarten, principles of random selection (Robson, 2002) were initially attempted. The researcher tried to approach each possible

kindergarten through a telephone introduction followed by a personal visit in accordance with local protocol. However, most kindergartens approached declined to take part in the study. As a result, the sampling strategy needed adjustment and the selection of kindergartens was drawn from lists of kindergartens provided through personal contacts. Using the kindergarten lists and the selection criteria, three kindergartens including one provincial kindergarten (urban area), one city kindergarten (urban area), and one university kindergarten (semi-rural area) were selected in Nanchang city and one private kindergarten (rural area) was selected in Jiujiang city (*九江市*).

Once the sample kindergartens were finalised, the researcher visited each kindergarten and explained to the relevant personnel (head teachers, or senior teachers, or senior administrators) in detail about the research, its purpose, and the data collection technique. All these kindergartens agreed that the research could be conducted in their settings. However, they felt uncomfortable with the idea of conducting observations. Eventually, they agreed that the researcher could observe class activities and school activities according to the timetable. However, they warned that they would not guarantee the validity and reliability of observations because teachers and children might be influenced by the researcher's presence.

The selection of teachers for interviews was based on the arrangement for observation agreed by the kindergartens. The researcher firstly observed three teachers who were teaching different age groups and their classroom activities in each kindergarten. After each observation, the researcher tried to negotiate with the teacher to participate in a follow-up interview. However, most of the

teachers observed declined to be interviewed despite being given the explanation for the purpose of follow-up interviews. As a result, instead of interviewing all the teachers who were observed in the initial stage, the researcher was only able to interview the teachers who agreed to be interviewed. As for the selection of parents for interviews, one source was the kindergarten visits. Each time the researcher visited the kindergarten; she randomly talked to some parents and asked them if they were interested in being interviewed about their views on early years education. If they agreed to participate, interviews were then undertaken at an agreed time and location.

Profile of the kindergartens

For this study, a sample of four kindergartens (see Table 3-3) was drawn from early years settings in Jiangxi province. These four kindergartens were chosen because they represented different administrative and financial features as presented in Chapter 1. These differences provided the opportunity for both the literal and the theoretical replication (Yin, 1994) process. This section of the chapter will briefly describe the background information of the participating kindergartens.

Kindergarten 1

Kindergarten 1 is situated in the western part of Nanchang city (*南昌市*, a semi-rural area), and is attached to Jiangxi Normal University. It serves children of university professors and lecturers. There are 632 children on the roll (275 girls and 357 boys) aged between three and six. Children are grouped into 16 mixed ability classes. The average class size is 40. The staff consists of one

head teacher and two deputy head teachers, 33 teachers, and 29 supporting staff which includes medical doctors and nurses, catering staff, security staff, nursery nurses, cleaners, and accountants. The attendance rate is 98% including unauthorised absences (this percentage for absences is calculated taking into consideration the proportion of absent children whose reason for being absent are known (or authorised) to the pre-school and also those not known or appropriately reported). About a quarter of the children come from outside the university community, with the permission of the head teacher.

The classrooms are spacious and decorated with drawings, pictures, and handicrafts made by both teachers and children; inside each classroom, a sleeping area is prepared for the children after lunch. There is a reading room stocked with picture books, story books, and a piano, a multi-media teaching centre, and an indoor play centre. Computers and audio cassettes are available in all classrooms. Teachers are required to use the computer to prepare their teaching materials and lesson plans. The outdoor playgrounds are divided into two separate areas; one is for daily exercise and the other is equipped with a wide variety of play equipment, such as swings, seesaws, rocking horses, and slides.

Kindergarten 2

Kindergarten 2 is an inner-city kindergarten run by the city government, which serves children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. There are 863 children on the roll (437 girls and 426 boys) aged between three and six. The children are grouped into 21 mixed ability classes. The average class size is 40. The staff consists of one head teacher and three deputy head teachers, 49

teachers, and 39 supporting staff which includes doctors and nurses, catering staff, nursery nurses, and cleaners. The attendance rate is 96% including unauthorised absences.

Classrooms are very spacious and divided into a sleeping area, a reading area, a toy area, and a handicraft area. There is a music teaching room with different musical instruments and a large dancing room with big mirrors on each wall. Pianos and air-conditioning are available in all classrooms. Teachers are able to use the pianos to comfort and relax the children. The outdoor playground includes a daily exercise area and the outdoor play equipment, such as slides, swings, and rocking horses.

Table 3-3: Kindergarten information

	Kindergarten 1	Kindergarten 2	Kindergarten 3	Kindergarten 4
Size	Small (16 Classes)	Average (21 Classes)	Large (26 Classes)	Small (10 Classes)
Type	Whole day school	Whole day school	Whole day school	Whole day school
Location	West Nanjing Road	Zhongshan Road (West)	Minde Road (East)	New Industry Area
Socioeconomic status	High to medium	High, medium and low	High	High to medium
Sponsoring body	University	Municipal government	Provincial government	Private
Time in Operation	65 years	30 years	30 years	5 years

Kindergarten 3

Kindergarten 3 is a government funded kindergarten situated in the centre of Nanchang city (*南昌市*). A large percentage of the children attending kindergarten 3 come from families with a professional background and most of them have quite a high socio-economic status. The kindergarten serves 1150 children (510 girls and 640 boys) aged from three to six. Children are grouped into 26 mixed ability classes. The average class size is 43. The staff consists of one head teacher and three deputy head teachers, 60 teachers, and 30 supporting staff which includes medical doctors and nurses, catering staff, nursery nurses, security staff, and cleaners. In this kindergarten, head teachers do not share teaching responsibilities. Every morning, doctors and nurses perform daily check ups for each child and records are made accordingly.

Classrooms are large, light, and divided into a sleeping area, a water-play area, a sand-play area, a drawing area, a handicraft area, reading area, and role play area. A multi-purpose activity room is equipped with computers, projector, and stereo system, which is used for a wide range of activities including teaching activities, annual performances, and so forth. The kindergarten includes a garden, three teaching buildings, and two playgrounds with a variety of equipment.

Kindergarten 4

Kindergarten 4 is a private kindergarten located in a newly built industrial area which is in Jiujiang city (*九江市*). Some of the parents of this kindergarten run their own businesses. Most children attending this kindergarten come from

middle class backgrounds. There are 280 children on the roll (130 girls and 150 boys) aged from 3½ to 6. The children are divided into 10 mixed ability classes. The average class size is 28. The staff consists of one head teacher and three deputy head teachers, 20 teachers, and 10 supporting staff which includes doctors and nurses, catering staff, nursery nurses, and security staff.

The classrooms are rather small and equipped with basic resources for teaching. There are another 10 bedrooms in which the children sleep after lunch. Inside and outside, the building is decorated with drawings and handicrafts made by teachers. The outdoor facilities are limited but efficiently used. There is a television in each classroom; a dancing room is located on the ground floor of the building.

3.5b Selection of the research instruments and techniques

The researcher employed four techniques to collect data and to triangulate information from different angles: 1) questionnaires with teachers and parents to ascertain their understandings, perspectives, perception of the value of ECEC in the current context; 2) the review and analysis of documents (i.e. general policy, staff handbook, lesson plans, curriculum guidance, amongst others); 3) observations of teachers' classroom activities, analysed in relation to the implementation of current polices; 4) interviews with head teachers, teachers, and parents to compare their discourse and practice. Thus, a close examination of the implementation of ECEC policy in this sample of four public and private kindergartens was undertaken and offered sufficient triangulation through different data collection methods to ensure robust findings (Tobin, 1995; Robson,

2002).

Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire survey in this study aimed to collect general information from teachers and parents involved in early years education. The questionnaire, sent out to kindergarten teachers in Jiangxi province, attempted to elicit information about implementation, practices, and perceptions of current ECEC policy. The information collected through the questionnaires included data about teachers' professional development, classroom activities, parental involvement, etc. This was used to generate general information and further to combine the quantified data with the qualitative data for further interpretation. Besides closed questions, some open-ended questions were included in order to elicit more information about respondents' perspectives, understandings, beliefs, values, and concerns in relation to ECEC. The questionnaires for parents aimed to find out what parents' perceptions and expectations were of ECEC, and how they were involved in children's early learning experiences.

For this questionnaire survey, 424 copies of questionnaires were sent out (see Appendix 2), which included copies for all the kindergarten teachers (n=162) and copies for parents (10% of the total population of children, n=262). After eliminating four useless copies from teachers and 10 useless copies from parents, altogether 96 copies from teachers and 167 copies from parents were returned. The total return rate for teachers was 57% and the total return rate for parents was 60%.

Documentation for review

This study focuses on the implementation of policy in practice of Chinese ECEC (with reference to Jiangxi Province). In order to develop a general picture of ECEC policy, a number of documents including national and provincial ECEC policy and regulations, education laws, curriculum guidance, instructions, and official statistics, were collected for review and analysis (see Table 3-4). Documents collected at this stage provided valuable insights into the official view of ECEC, as well as rich information regarding the content, aims, and requirements of ECEC.

Table 3-4: Data collected for review

Government Data	Kindergarten Data	Individual Teacher
·Education laws ·Curriculum guidance ·Instructions ·Official statistics ·Relevant research papers	·Kindergarten Curriculum ·Curriculum plans ·Activity plans ·Activity Photos ·Term schedules	·Teaching plans ·Study summaries ·Teaching summaries ·Written observations ·Parent feedback ·Photographic recordings

Information related to each kindergarten, including the kindergarten curriculum, programme plans, activity plans, photos, and term schedules was also gathered. The information provided from these sources was extremely rich. Insights into each kindergarten's interpretation of ECEC policy were identified. After meeting the participants and gaining their permission, records were collected from each teacher for review, such as their individual teaching plans, study summaries, annual teaching summaries, written observations, parents' feedback, and children's photos.

The documentation collected in this study consisted of information from three different levels: state, local kindergartens, and individual teachers. This documentation enabled the researcher to gain a complete picture of ECEC at the policy making (national and provincial) level. Further, clear insights into practitioners' practice and perceptions were obtained.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing can be a very powerful data-gathering technique, in terms of providing access to people's minds as well as to things which cannot be observed directly (Seidman, 1998). Interviewing involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals (Cohen & Manion, 1994). In this way, it enables the researcher to gather in-depth information as well as to pick up non-verbal messages in the process of interaction. Hutchinson (1988) also suggests that interviewing permits researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and take into account the 'lived' experience of participants. Interviews allow the researcher access to peoples' minds by exploring what they know, what they think and what they like or dislike.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) suggest that interviews can be divided into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured in light of the degree of control and the type of questions. In this research, a semi-structured (Patton, 1980; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) interview format was chosen because it was considered to be the most suitable approach for collecting data in this context. It allowed respondents to express their ideas, and it offered enough shape to prevent 'aimless rambling' (Wragg, 1982, p.10). The semi-structured format also allowed

some interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Thus, the researcher still remained fully in control of the interview. By changing the wording and the order of the questions, the researcher elicited helpful information and avoided unnecessary repetition.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three kindergarten head teachers, three kindergarten teachers, and three kindergarten parents from K1, K2, and K4 soon after the completion of the first stage observations (see Table 3-5 & Table 3-6), in order to explore certain issues related to implementing ECEC policy. Due to the problem of unapproachable to the participants especially the head teacher from K3, there were no head teachers and teachers were agreed to participate in the interviews. Therefore, only nine participants were involved in the interviews.

A set of pre-determined open-ended questions was prepared to investigate the research questions. The semi-structured format allowed greater flexibility in the interview process, avoided the problem of leading the interviews, allowed the respondents free expression of their ideas, and allowed the interviewer free investigation of certain questions in greater depth, if necessary (Cohen, *et al,* 2000). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used throughout the research as a key technique to explore respondents' beliefs, understanding, values, and perceptions. At this stage, practitioners' attitudes towards and views on ECEC policy were gathered. In addition, the understanding and implementation of ECEC policy by each individual teacher were also explored.

Table 3-5: Interviewees (head teachers and teachers) general information

Interviewee	Kindergarten	Gender	Years of Professional Experience						Educational background	Further Education
			0-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	>20		
HT1	K1	F						√	Secondary School	Diploma
HT2	K2	F						√	Teaching Certificate	BA
HT3	K4	F			√				Teaching Certificate	BA
T1	K1	F		√					achelor Degree	MA
T2	K2	F			√				Bachelor Degree	N/A
T3	K4	F	√						Teaching Certificate	N/A

Table 3-6: Interviewees (parents) general information

Interviewee	Kindergarten	Gender	Occupation	Educational Background	SES
P1	K1	F	Teacher	BSc	High
P2	K2	F	Accountant	Diploma	Medium
P3	K4	M	Technician	MSc	High

The interviews were conducted according to a schedule (see Appendix 4) that had been pre-determined at the preliminary stage of the field work, and had been modified through the pilot stage and after the analysis of questionnaire and observation data. Interviews were conducted after discussion with interviewees according to their availability. With their permission, these interviews were tape recorded. The researcher transcribed, translated, and summarised the interview data immediately after each interview. The interview data were analysed to validate documentation, questionnaires, and observation results.

When conducting interviews, factors such as the relationship between interviewer and interviewees and the atmosphere during the interviews, which could affect the authenticity and quality of the interview data (Merriam, 1988; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Cohen, *et al.,* 2000), were taken into consideration. Firstly, in order to seek a balance of rapport and neutrality, the researcher built up a relationship with each respondent based on empathy, respect, and understanding. A certain amount of distance remained between the interviewer and interviewees. Secondly, to encourage open and free responses, the researcher tried to create a natural and relaxed atmosphere. Furthermore, efforts were made not to reveal any personal views on certain issues, implying approval or disagreement with the responses.

Unstructured observations

In order to explore how Chinese ECEC policy is translated and put into practice in early years settings in Jiangxi province, unstructured observations (See Appendix 4) were considered the most suitable approach to collect data by directly watching and listening to what people do and say in a natural situation

(Robson, 2002) in which the researcher joined the participants' world (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000) without manipulating the classroom situation or posing questions to the participants. Observations would present a clear picture of classroom activities and allow the examination of the interconnection between what teachers said and what they actually did, and reveal whether there was a difference between teachers' words and actions.

Two contrasting types of observation have been identified (Robson, 2002): unstructured observation and structured observation. Unstructured observation was chosen in this study so that the researcher interfered as little with teachers and children as possible to avoid influencing their behaviours and to collect genuine classroom activities and interactions. Therefore, throughout each observation, the researcher stayed at the back of the classroom to minimise interaction with participants, especially children.

The observation was scheduled as the same length as each session, which varied from 20 minutes in lower grade (3 year olds, 小班) to 30 minutes in higher grade (6 years old, 大班). The foci of the observation for each session were class activities, teachers' actions, and children's responses. The researcher used a timer of five minutes interval in order to efficiently record the classroom activities within the time interval.

The first phase of observations was carried out in the four selected kindergartens, which included 12 kindergarten teachers (three teachers in each kindergarten) and their students. These observations mainly focused on teaching and learning activities. The second phase of observations was

conducted after the interview data had been collected. The same class teachers and their students were observed again during their teaching in order to compare what they said in interviews with what they actually did in practice. When visiting each kindergarten, particular attention was also paid to the kindergarten setting, facilities and teaching resources, classroom arrangement and lay-out to include this information for further analysis.

Observations were first recorded as quick, simple, and descriptive field notes. For each classroom observation, the researcher recorded the classroom activities and the teachers' and children's interaction briefly. When necessary, the researcher also drew simple pictures to describe the classroom situations. After each observation, the observation notes were then organised and summarised into short descriptive notes including the event (what is the activity), the behaviours (both teachers' and children's behaviours), and the time line (the duration of behaviours over time). In so doing, each observation summary can be easily processed and analysed. Compared with two phases observations, the summary helped the researcher to seek for patterns and intentions in the classroom activities (Tobin, 1995).

3.5c The design of the research instruments

This study adopted questionnaires, interviews, and observations as the main data collection techniques. In order to gain reliable and authentic data, the researcher designed questionnaires, generated interview questions, and formulated an observation schedule. In this section, the process of designing the research instruments will be described.

Questionnaire design

In order to collect the general perspectives of kindergarten teachers and parents, the researcher designed two different questionnaires for each group of participants. The questionnaire for kindergarten teachers focused on their understanding of current ECEC policy and how they translated the policy into practice. In particular, the questionnaires focused, in detail, on their understanding, perspectives, and beliefs about current ECEC and its practice.

It was comprised of two parts totalling 35 questions: a) general information about their gender, age, teaching experiences, the age group currently taught, the number of children in the class, and the children's age range; b) specific views about ECEC including their qualifications and professional development, teaching philosophy, the understanding of curriculum, parental involvement, the class arrangement, monitoring children's achievement, preparation for formal schooling, and their perception of current changes in ECEC.

The questionnaire for parents aimed to gain understanding of their perspectives on ECEC and their understanding of the kindergarten's everyday practice. The main focus of this questionnaire was to ascertain the parents' perspectives of the kindergarten, teachers, and daily practice. Further, an open-ended question about current changes in policy and practice was included for teachers and parents.

It was composed of two parts totalling 26 questions: a) general information about their child's gender, school year, type of provision currently attended, their won age, education level, and their occupation; b) detailed understanding of ECEC

including perceptions of kindergarten, the understanding of curriculum and parental involvement, monitoring children's achievement, children's daily kindergarten activities, the preparation for formal schooling, and their perception of current changes in ECEC.

Both closed questions and open-ended questions were adopted in the questionnaires. This allowed participants to be flexible in answering questions. Data about participants' understanding of and perspectives on current policy, educational philosophy and practice were analysed to find out differences between policy and practice.

Generating interview questions

As mentioned in the previous section, specific questions about current ECEC were identified in the questionnaire as particularly relevant. The researcher therefore designed a series of interview questions for the head teachers, teachers, and three parents on the basis of the questionnaire data. Interviews were conducted with parents to elicit their perspectives, understanding and beliefs about ECEC; whether they preferred more academic or play-based activities for their children; whether and how they were involved in their children's education; and what changes they had perceived in early childhood practice in recent years. The interview questions for teachers included their understanding of the definition, concept and role of ECEC; the use of concepts about ECEC in teaching and learning; and issues hindering the implementation of ECEC in early years settings. Particular perceptions of ECEC were obtained through interviewing three head teachers. Interviews with head teachers involved their philosophy, the curriculum, their comments on teaching young

children and their perception of children's education and care. In addition, the researcher also explored their ideas about how to improve their performance by putting ECEC policy into a practical context.

Observation schedule

Wang (1990) suggests that observation is the beginning of research as well as the starting point of many research questions. Creswell (1998) also points out that observation is an essential step in qualitative research. Therefore, in this research, observations were conducted in two phases: 1) after the initial questionnaire survey and before interviews; and 2) after the interviews. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire addressed to kindergarten teachers focused on eliciting their perspectives towards ECEC and how they translated current ECEC policy into practice.

The first phase of observation, hence, observed teaching activities, including language activities, and students' responses in order to validate the results concluded by the questionnaires. Huang (1999) indicated that when using both observations and interviews in the same study, observations should be used to validate the information provided by interviewees. The second phase observations were conducted after the semi-structured interviews had been completed. The focus of this phase of observations was on how teachers' actions compared with their reported behaviours in interviews.

Thus, both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were adopted to provide evidence to answer the research questions. The examination of ECEC policy, practice, and discourses through a questionnaire survey, observations

and interviews provided the focus. An in-depth analysis of current policy (at the macro level) as interpreted and implemented in local practice (at the micro level) was undertaken after detailed examination.

3.5d Fieldwork procedures

The whole empirical investigation started in mid-April 2005. Each kindergarten was visited twice between mid-April and the beginning of May. These exploratory visits aimed at explaining the outline of the research to relevant staff in each kindergarten, establishing contacts with kindergarten teachers, and getting to know the kindergarten. A detailed research plan was discussed with the head teachers in terms of gaining consent, working out schedules, and making arrangements for the field work. Letters were also sent out to teachers and parents to explain the research aims and to seek their permission (See Appendix 1).

The empirical fieldwork was undertaken following these negotiations and after obtaining consent from the teachers and parents. In each kindergarten, the researcher stayed for a week, talked to teachers, parents, and children, observed the daily kindergarten activities in the morning, middle of the day and in the afternoon, as well as noting the environment, facilities, and equipment. After the preliminary visits, the researcher sent out questionnaires to every teacher (n=162) and to some randomly chosen parents (10% of the total population of children, n=262). Meanwhile, the observations were undertaken in classrooms with different age groups (i.e. 3 years, 4 years, and 5 years old). After the observations, a small number of informal conversations were carried

out with each class teacher observed in order to discuss the class, the purposes of the activities, and any follow-up activities. Formal interview arrangements were then set up with some class teachers, based on their agreement to participate. These interviews were carried out after the initial data from the questionnaires and observations were analysed.

Factors hindering the data collection process

As explained in the previous section, this study included data from documentary analysis, a questionnaire survey, observations, and interviews. However, several factors arose unexpectedly during the field work which made the researcher modify the strategy to accomplish the data-gathering process.

The first issue was the selection of the sample of kindergartens. Because of differences among the provinces, the selection of kindergartens was based on a list of kindergartens provided by personal contacts who could facilitate access. Four types of kindergartens were chosen, including three publicly funded kindergartens and one private kindergarten, in rural, semi-rural, and urban settings.

The researcher then had to negotiate access with each kindergarten individually. The original plan for classroom observations was to video record the activities. However, three kindergarten heads did not agree to the use of video recording. The reasons included i) its intrusive effects on both teachers and children. They felt that the presence of the researcher in the classroom would bring difficulties to the teachers in terms of managing class activities. The video recorder would make teachers even more self-conscious when carrying out normal classroom

activities; ii) the protection of the kindergarten, its teachers, and children. They felt that video recordings would put the kindergarten under surveillance. Since the researcher could not describe in advance the particular focus of classroom observations, the kindergarten heads were concerned that video tape evidence might be used against the kindergartens. Even through the researcher explained that the video tapes were only for research purposes, a strict principle of confidentiality was adopted, and a promise not to misuse the data was made, the head teachers still felt uncomfortable with the idea. Thus, the researcher had to abandon the idea of video-recording teachers' classroom activities and note-taking was used instead.

Another factor forced a further change of plan. It had originally been decided that the questionnaire should consist mostly of open-ended questions to elicit the views of teachers and parents in an unrestricted way. In so doing, practitioners would be able to express their ideas freely without being influenced by the researcher's preconceived ideas.

However, most teachers were not keen to complete a questionnaire which was full of open-ended questions. Chinese kindergarten teachers have not only a very heavy daily teaching workload, but also responsibilities for caring for children. Most teachers said that, after a busy day of teaching and taking care of children, they could not spend the extra time required to reflect on and to record their opinions. In the pilot study, a significant number of teachers filled in the questionnaire in a negligent and careless manner, leaving many questions blank. The large amount of missing information jeopardised the quality of the data.

It appeared that the original questionnaire was impractical and would not obtain

the information needed. Therefore the original intention of using an open-ended questionnaire to elicit information about beliefs, perspectives, and understandings was abandoned. A more structured questionnaire with pre-determined choices of answers was designed and validated. Thus, the initial research design was amended to include a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

3.6 Cultural concerns

When conducting research using a Western style, in terms of research design, methodology, data collection methods, and analytic strategies, the researcher is very likely to face problems of cultural differences. The researcher must be sensitive to the dangers of subtle cultural influences (Baez, 1998) when carrying out the research. Therefore, cultural factors were taken into consideration to minimize their impact on the research; a detailed discussion of cultural issues is presented in the following sections.

3.6a Kindergartens in Chinese settings

In order to discuss some of the cultural differences which arise in Chinese pre-school settings, an introduction to pre-school provision, teachers' responsibilities, and the curriculum is necessary as these factors distinguish Chinese settings from Western ones.

Unlike most Western countries, most kindergartens in China are relatively large in terms of size, the number of children and classes, playground space, facilities, and teachers. The average class size is about 30 to 35 children. However, the

average size varies widely from place to place. There are marked differences between urban and rural settings. Moreover, kindergarten provision also varies; most kindergartens provide services for children aged from 3 to 6, but some kindergartens accept children from the age of 2. As discussed earlier, in order to achieve comparability across the settings, only kindergartens covering children aged 3 to 6 were included.

Chinese kindergarten teachers' roles are distinctively different from those in the West. In China, the class teacher has the sole responsibility for teaching and caring for the children. They take responsibility for different areas including children's daily life, safety and health issues, as well as learning. Safety is one of the issues to which teachers pay great attention. Caring for children occupies most of the teachers' time at kindergarten. In many kindergartens, there are two class teachers in each class and there is another nursery nurse to assist class teachers in terms of class maintenance, and children's eating, and sleeping. However, some kindergartens only have two teachers in each class who have to carry out the workload for three people.

In China, most kindergartens have mixed-ability single-age classes, which may include children with learning difficulties or special educational needs. Individual learning difficulties and special educational needs are not recognised in Chinese kindergartens. Normally, the same class teachers will remain with the children throughout their kindergarten lives. In many Chinese kindergartens, children are taught using the same curriculum and same teaching methods, with little differentiation to meet particular children's needs.

The kindergarten curriculum is another factor which distinguishes the Chinese

kindergarten system from the Western one. Kindergarten programmes in China are guided by the Kindergarten Education Guidance, issued by the Ministry of Education (2001). Within the framework provided by the guidance, the individual kindergarten chooses the curriculum for their children. Currently, the most popular curriculum is the series published by the East China Normal University which consists of five learning areas, namely Health, Language, Science, Society, and Arts. Kindergartens use other teaching materials, such as bilingual teaching activities or Montessori practical classes, as a strategy to attract and increase enrolment.

In summary, these factors create distinctive contextual and cultural discourses of teaching and caring for young children, and they were taken into consideration when selecting the sample of kindergartens: i) only kindergartens catering for children aged from 3 to 6 were included in order to facilitate comparison among the settings; ii) only kindergartens which used the same curriculum were included; iii) the selection of kindergartens in this research was based on the criteria presented in Chapter 1. Kindergartens were chosen as being typical and representative of kindergartens in China. The size of kindergartens and classes was not taken into consideration because there are very distinctive differences between settings.

3.6b Issues of conducting the research

Cultural factors not only affected the selection of kindergartens, but also impacted on the conduct of the research. The first issue affected by cultural factors is the reliability and authenticity of the data obtained through qualitative

methods. The field work was conducted in four kindergartens over a period of nine months during which the researcher carried out the collection of documentation, questionnaire survey, 24 unstructured observations and nine semi-structured interviews.

The research was carried out by arrangement with each kindergarten. As a result of preliminary negotiation, the observations had to be carried out at the convenience of the kindergarten. Twenty-four observations were carried out with the agreement of the kindergarten and the researcher had little control over choosing classes to observe. It was not clear whether the activities the researcher observed were spontaneous or specially arranged. It was also apparent that most of teachers were to some extent 'showing off' their 'best performances' to the researcher. It is probable that the classroom activities observed were specially arranged demonstrations with the best teachers of the kindergarten, in well-prepared contexts, showing positive interactions between teachers and children.

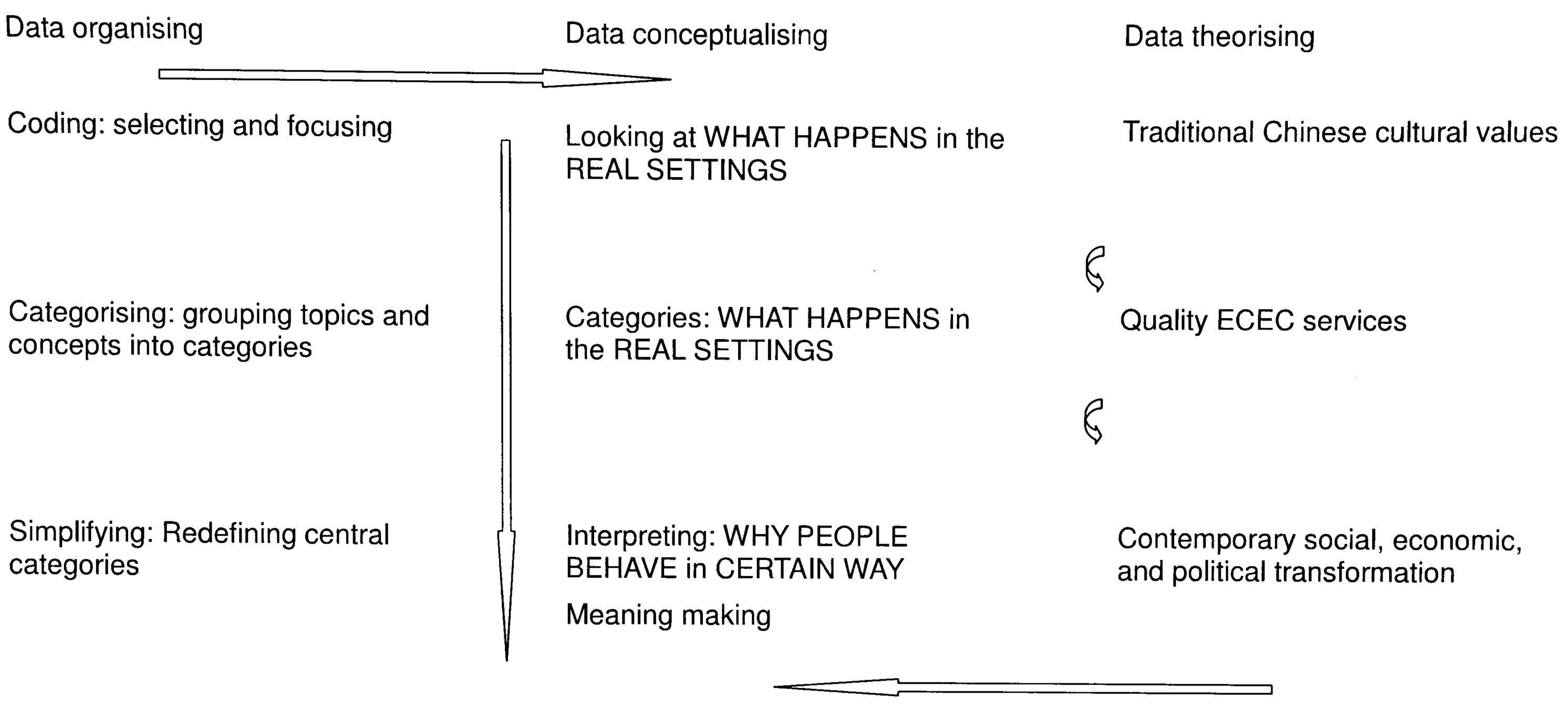
It seemed to the researcher that the Chinese culture had an influence on the situations observed. The tradition of giving a positive impression (so as not to lose face) of the Chinese people (Yan, 2000) may have influenced the kindergarten's general views of outsiders including the researcher. Being aware of such cultural influences, the researcher tried to observe teachers' behaviours and teacher-child interactions outside the classrooms in less formal situations. Through this, the researcher hoped to obtain evidence to reinforce her observations. The use of multiple data collection methods seemed necessary when dealing with cultural factors in China, in order to obtain comprehensive,

reliable, and authentic data for this study.

3.7 The analytical framework

Data analysis was a critical issue for this research. It was a sustained process which started soon after the fieldwork began and continued till the end of the study. For this research, the data analysis consisted of a series of operations (Miles & Huberman, 1994a) to derive meaning from the data (see Figure 3-1). In presenting the analytical framework, it is important to point out that the data operation process was a multi-stage operation through which the data were coded, categorised into emerging concepts and topics, simplified by reducing and regrouping similar topics and concepts, and finally interpreted by positioning the refined data within the theoretical framework of the research. The whole data operation process was not a linear information transformation, it constantly involved revisiting the previously collected data, reviewing topics and concepts, and redefining new concepts.

Figure 3-1: Analytical framework (source: Miles & Huberman, 1994a)



In general, the processes of organising data involved a detailed presentation of processing and simplifying the interview and observation data. The conceptualizing processes identified the main steps through which the organised data was given meaning by interpreting what happens in the settings and why it happens in certain ways. Finally, the processes of theorising data developed understanding based on the theoretical framework, which was presented in Chapter 2. Traditional Chinese cultural values and contemporary social, economic, and political changes in Chinese society were combined to further interpret the refined data.

In this research, the primary sources of data were: 1) questionnaires for teachers and parents from each kindergarten; 2) documents including policy documents, class plans, curriculum guidance; 3) observation notes from class activities of teachers' behaviour, children's responses, and teacher-child interactions; 4) semi-structured interviews with head teachers, teachers, and parents.

Analysing the raw qualitative data involved organising the data into manageable units with topics and concepts identified on the basis of quality ECEC services developed by Dahlberg *et al.* (1999). Subsequently, the ultimate task of data analysis was to give 'meaning' to the collected data and to explain what happens in the settings and why it happens in a certain way. Therefore, in the following sections, the analysis of the qualitative data will be discussed step by step, describing the processes of data organising, conceptualising, and theorising. The analysis of the quantitative data (questionnaires to teachers and parents) included a descriptive analysis. The analysis of the quantitative data was conducted using SPSS v. 14.0.

3.7a Quantitative data analysis processes

As explained earlier, the questionnaires were designed with pre-coded multiple choices (Howell, 1997) which can be easily entered into SPSS sheet and further processed. Before entering all collected questionnaire data into SPSS sheet, decisions were made in terms how each column was labelled and what data would be entered in the cells of each columns (Robson, 2002). In this respect, the columns were labelled in accordance with the questionnaire questions, while each row contained the specific information from each questionnaire. During the process of processing the questionnaire data into SPSS sheet, certain aspects were paid special attention including the issue of the missing information.

Regarding the missing information, the most acceptable solution to such problem is not to have any (Youngman, 1979). However, in the questionnaire survey conducted in this study, it was apparent that there were some questions were left blank by some respondents. Under such circumstances, particular attention was paid to obtain valid statistic information. When entering the data, -1 was used as the special code for the missing information through which SPSS would automatically take into account.

Once the questionnaire data were typed into SPSS sheet, an exploratory data analysis (EDA, Tukey, 1977) was carried out to explore what the data could suggest. The primary aim of such statistic analysis was to describe the data through calculating means, frequency, and percentage (Howell, 1997). As for this study, the main purpose of the questionnaire survey was to collect general information of the practitioners and parents about their understandings and

perspectives towards ECEC policy and day to day practice. In such respect, a descriptive analysis was considered appropriate by providing general statistics to describe the situation.

3.7b Qualitative data analysis processes

In this research, the data analysis included three stages: organising, conceptualising, and theorising. This section discusses each of them. Firstly, the organising stage involved making decisions about the codes, categorising coded data into meaningful units within a central topic or concept, combining those units into more specific concepts, and interpreting each concept. In order to organise the collected data into meaningful units, the data were systematically coded on the basis of Dahlberg *et al.*'s (1999) arguments for evaluating the performance or quality of early childhood institutions through examining their input, process, and outcome:

> 'input refers to resources and organisational dimensions of institutions, which include group size, levels of staff training, adult to child ratios, and the presence and content of curriculum. Process refers to what happens in the institution, in particular the activities of children, the behaviour of staff and interactions between children and adults. This category can be extended to cover relationships between the institutions and parents. Outcome criteria have mainly been defined in terms of certain aspects of child development, but also to young children's later school, social and economic performance sometimes stretching as far as adulthood' (p.97).

Generally, the first level of analysis aimed to identify what the data were describing, including each translated questionnaire comment, the observation notes, and interview transcripts. Going through the data carefully aimed to

provide a general understanding of the descriptions, which the data presented. The data, then, were carefully gone through several times in order to identify topics and concepts. Highlighting the data in accordance with topics and concepts was carried out while going through each set of data. The length of these units varied from one or two words to one or two sentences, or even one or two paragraphs, depending on the content. Once the data were categorised according to topics and concepts, the first analysis sheet combined all the information obtained and the selected data was typed into an EXCEL sheet. The four-section analysis sheet (see Table 3-7) displayed information including line numbers, topics/concepts, highlighted text, and comments. The comments here were generally commentary descriptions, which were given to the topics.

32	Staff views and opinions	I found some contents of this curriculum suit well in big city like Shanghai. Sometimes, we have difficulties when conducting the curriculum because the city like Nanchang is not as modern as the big cities. The environment of such markets in Nanchang is bad, noisy, crowded, and dirty. So we can't let children experience by themselves. What we can do is take them there and walk around. It takes big efforts to keep them in group and make sure they are clean and safe.	This short extract is initiated by a teacher who feels powerless to make the curriculum relevant in a particular city. She makes comparison of conducting curriculum in big cities.
71	Parental satisfaction	It is positive, I think. Parents do respect us, when they have questions they are willing to discuss with us. We also try to involve parents in, make appropriate communication, and work together for a better kindergarten.	In this short extract, the respondent continues her emphasis on the importance of parental involvement in children's kindergarten lives
91	Children's learning outcomes	For sure, happiness is very important for childhood. By freedom I mean children should feel free to play, to explore, and to understand the world. With learning, they also accumulate knowledge for the future.	In this part of conversation, the respondent expresses her perspectives towards childhood. For her, happiness is more important than learning.

Table 3-7: First level of data analysis (example I)

he second level of analysis involved simplifying the categorised topics and oncepts in order to develop more specific themes and ideas, which could acilitate further analysis. In order to identify key topics and concepts, the first evel topics and concepts were combined in order to build up relationships within the previously identified categories. Therefore, new categories were leveloped by reassembling the data (see Table 3-8). The newly developed ategories mainly focused on the discussion of 'ECEC in official discourse', institutional features', 'curriculum arrangement', 'teachers' in-service training', children's learning outcomes', 'integration of parents', and 'preparation for ormal schooling', which will be discussed in later sections. Once the ategories were redefined, the analysis moved towards interpreting the data. The main task of interpreting the data involved explaining the findings through hree themes in relation to the input, process, and outcome of early childhood nstitutions.

Table 3-8: Second level of data analysis (example II)

Central Topics/Concepts	Combined Texts
Delivering the curriculum (dealing with issues)	some contents of this curriculum suit well in big city like Shanghai; we have difficulties when conducting the curriculum; we can't let children experience by themselves; it takes big efforts to keep them in group and make sure they are clean and safe; we don't have much snow in the city, how can we make a snowman without snow; so we skip those undoable sessions or make replacement for unsuitable ones
The involvement of parents	Parents do respect us, when they have questions they are willing to discuss with us. We also try to involve parents, make appropriate communication, and work together for a better kindergarten; the importance of parents and kindergarten relationship for a supportive environment for children. We had family day and parents' meeting which help parents to understand what we do and give them opportunities to discuss with us regarding children's learning.

At the end of the organising stage, the interview data were organised into nine files, one for each interviewee; and observation data were organised into 24 files, two for each teacher. The questionnaire data was also treated in the same way, so the questionnaire data was organised into eight files, two for each kindergarten. Each file contained information from teachers and parents. Documents were also coded and categorised and were stored for a further analysis.

Secondly, the conceptualising stage focused on dealing with concepts emerging from the data, through which to identify 'what happened in the real settings' and to explain 'why people would interpret and implement policy in their own particular ways'. Finally, data developed through the first and second levels of analysis were brought together to identify general patterns of implementing ECEC policy at the practical level. At this stage, the researcher attempted to identify differences in terms of practice and implementation among settings. Meanwhile, positioning 'what happened in the real settings' (behaviour patterns) in contemporary social, economic, and political transformation, the researcher attempted to explain why the implementation of ECEC policy into practice has occurred in the way observed in this research.

3.7c Identification of topics and development of concepts

The preliminary codes used to identify topics and concepts mainly focused on class size, levels of staff training, adult to child ratios, content of curriculum, activities of children, the behaviour of teachers, the interactions between children and adults, relationship between institutions and parents, children's

development, impact on later schooling, and parental satisfaction. However, after carefully going through the questionnaire comments, interview transcripts, and observation notes, the need for further modification became apparent.

The fundamental differences between Chinese and Western culture were regarded as the major reason for modifying the preliminary codes. The Chinese have very different perspectives on 'quality' (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999). Generally, the Chinese have strong beliefs about 'public' or 'state' institutions (Chen, 2000; Chen & Liu, 2000). According to the Chinese point of view, 'public' or 'state' owned institutions can be assumed to embody 'quality'. Quality, therefore, is measured by their facilities, teaching and learning activities and children's learning outcomes (Chen, 2000). Quality teaching and learning activities and children's learning outcomes are always emphasised in Chinese educational contexts including early childhood institutions. Chinese early childhood institutions employ many different approaches, in terms of organising the curriculum, preparing and supervising teachers, monitoring children's achievement, and preparing children for future schooling, to ensure the quality of their services (Chen, 2000).

Another reason for modifying the preliminary codes was because some issues emphasised by Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) were not significant in Chinese settings while other issues, significant in Chinese settings, were not included. For example, teachers' attitudes towards children and their job were highlighted by both teachers and parents in the Chinese contexts, but were not given comparable significance in Western contexts. For the Chinese, it is important for a teacher to demonstrate a positive attitude towards children and the job of

teaching, as the teacher has a direct influence on children's thinking and behaviours. As another example, the Chinese kindergarten always has big classes (35 children or more), which inevitably provided large child: adult ratios. However, these big ratios do not necessarily mean poor 'quality'. In that sense, Western views of group size and adult to child ratios cannot be applied to Chinese provision.

Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) argue that even in kindergarten, children's later schooling is emphasised, but it was very difficult to trace any impact on future schooling in this study. As a result, it was decided to adopt the concept of 'preparation for future schooling' instead. Another adaptation was made in terms of involvement of parents in their children's learning. Parental involvement in children's learning has long been accepted in Chinese culture; Chinese parents place great importance on learning for their children's future well-being. This understanding has influenced ECEC practice in China to involve parents into their children's learning. Special curriculum activities have been organised to satisfy parental expectations and to involve them (Chen, 2000). In that sense, the discussion of parental involvement will be included in the discussion of curriculum arrangements.

Consequently, the preliminary codes were modified to incorporate topics and concepts particularly stressed in the Chinese preschool settings. Thus, the categories initially utilised to describe what happens in Chinese kindergartens were: ECEC in official discourse, institutional features, curriculum arrangements, teachers' in-service training, teachers' attitudes and teaching skills, children's learning, and preparation for formal schooling.

3.7d Language issues

Awareness of language issues was vital in this study, in terms of translating the collected data accurately, without misinterpreting and misunderstanding them. According to Ungerson (1996), language is an important issue which could influence the understanding and interpretation of data. National contexts and cultural perspectives are heavily embedded in the use of language (Ungerson, 1996). It is always difficult to fully understand the meaning of language without considering broader cultural contexts embodied in the use of language. In that sense, it is important to understand the meaning of language within the context within which the use of language is embedded.

In this study, the context of the use of language was in Chinese settings in which traditional Chinese cultural values influence people's behaviours and ways of using language. For example, 'face' literately means the front of the head and outward appearance. In Chinese, its deeper meaning means the 'glory' (*mian zi,* 面子) of a person (Bond, 1991). Another example, 'control' (*guan,* 管) always relates to restraining or having power over something or someone; however, in Chinese, 'control' also means 'to love' or 'to care for'. Consequently, special care was paid to interpreting language in terms of recognising the superficial and the deeper meanings.

The problem with language is related to the corruption of data (Ungerson, 1996) by the translation processes, a problem which is unique to qualitative data analysis. Issues relating to translation are significant for this research as it was designed in English, conducted in Chinese, analysed in English, and reported in

English. Consequently, sensitivity to the use and interpretation of language is critical to ensure the quality of data.

This research was conducted in Chinese settings where all the participants were Chinese and spoke Mandarin. The problems entailed by working in a different language than the one in which it would be reported meant the researcher had to focus on the task of translating data from Chinese into English, keeping original meanings and avoiding misinterpretations. As Ungerson (1996) pointed out, most researchers may not have command of more than one language and are unlikely to consider how to deal with language specially when contextualising the data. As a non-native English speaker, the researcher was fully aware of the effect that an inadequate translation of language might cause. In order to diminish the potential influence of language issues, special consideration was given to them.

At the preliminary design stage, the researcher first designed questionnaires in English and discussed them with the supervisor to ensure that these were well designed in terms of content, use of appropriate language, and their ability to elicit the requisite information. A pilot was then conducted with two native English speakers to ensure that the content and form of the questionnaires was appropriate. After this, minor adjustments were made, and then the English version of the questionnaires were given to three Chinese students with teaching backgrounds to check whether they could understand them and whether they had any suggestions related to their content. Further adjustments were then made and the final English version of questionnaires then produced.

The translation from English into Chinese was conducted in China during

preparation for the field work. The whole process was assisted by an interpreter who is a former colleague of the researcher, to ensure the translation was accurate and authentic. Once the first version of the translated questionnaires was completed, the researcher then gave it to one kindergarten head, three teachers, and two parents to complete. With their feedback, the first Chinese version was adjusted and the English translation was changed accordingly. After about three weeks, the Chinese version was finalised and sent to print. The interview questions were also treated in the same way; both English and Chinese versions were piloted and amended. These efforts ensured that the questionnaires and interview questions were well-designed in content as well as in language.

The same approach was taken when translating the data collected back into English. The questionnaire data were translated with help from a professional interpreter. For interview data, once the transcriptions were finished, the researcher invited the respondents to comment on them in order to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. Adjustments were made where necessary; after that the researcher then translated the transcribed data into English. The translation was conducted with the help of a translator to ensure that the language used conveyed the meaning accurately.

As mentioned earlier, initially, it is very difficult to fully convey the meaning of language in translation. Some words and sentences were particularly difficult to translate from English into Chinese or Chinese into English. Some Chinese ideas were very difficult to translate into English. For example, when Chinese people talk about 'face', it does not literally mean the normal meaning of 'face'

but includes reputation and prestige. Consequently, in this study language issues were not just merely related to the problem of translation or transliteration, but include more culturally embedded concerns. It is hoped that the researcher's awareness of such issues and bias has minimised the problem as much as possible.

3.8 Role of the researcher

The role of the researcher in empirical studies has long been a concern. A researcher is usually expected to be knowledgeable about the topic, the approaches, and ethical issues (Wang, 1990). In this study, the researcher adopted an insider-out status who had inside knowledge of Chinese ECEC together with experience of visiting and working in Western ECEC provision. In this respect, the researcher had fresh perspectives on Chinese ECEC provision. A strong desire to conduct empirical research on Chinese ECEC motivated the researcher to carry out this study.

The insider status of the researcher enabled her to detect problems in current ECEC provision; it also endangered the research in two ways: i) selectivity of observation. When observing activities, the researcher focused on certain activities. Woods (1986) suggests that every research is vulnerable to bias. The researcher's bias can be reflected in his/her selectivity. ii) Cultural influences. The researcher's awareness of the effects of cultural influences on the research project is the first step needed to overcome them, and thus these cultural factors should be taken into account at the design stage (Berting, 1987). As the researcher conducted the research within her own culture, there is a danger that

she may have taken things for granted as a cultural insider. An attempt has been made to consider cultural features when carrying out this study.

3.9 Research validity and reliability

When conducting the research, validity and reliability were key issues of concern. Therefore, the researcher kept validity and reliability in mind and tried to increase the accuracy and truth of the research by using different strategies to gain information from different angles. According to Hitchcock & Hughes (1995), validity is about the degree to which the data of a study can represent the reality it investigates. For Cohen *et al.* (2000) validity in qualitative data may be achieved through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved. In quantitative data, validity may be improved through careful sampling, instrumentation, and appropriate statistical treatment of the data (Cohen, *et al.*, p.105). While it is impossible to achieve perfect validity, the researcher strove to ensure validity as far as possible.

A number of strategies were used to increase the validity of the results, including adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods, using multiple data collection techniques and multiple sources of data, reviewing the accuracy of transcripts with interview participants, conducting a pilot, triangulating the results from different sources and methods, and selecting representative samples.

Triangulation was used to enhance the scope, depth, and consistency of the study (Flick, 2002). In order to triangulate, the researcher used multiple data collection techniques – document analysis, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observations. By triangulation, the researcher reduced the

danger of inappropriate certainty (Robson, 2002).

Reliability is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen *et al.* 2000). In qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The reliability of the research is dependent on data gathering and data analysis techniques, hence the researcher tried to make the research procedures as clear and explicit as possible.

In this study, the researcher enhanced reliability by making the research design clear, conducting clear data collection and analysis, trying to avoid any bias and subjectivity, and checking research findings with knowledgeable others. The researcher made a plan and discussed this with two supervisors and made changes when necessary. During the fieldwork, the researcher adopted the status of outsider-in to avoid influencing participants by her own subjectivity. After gathering the data, the researcher interpreted it with the assistance of two supervisors; after transcribing the interviews, participants were invited to verify it; when transcripts were produced, interview participants were invited to read and comment on them.

3.10 Ethical issues

Ethics is the making of moral judgements about the aims and methods of the study (Aubrey *et al.*, 2000). According to Smith (1990), ethics has to do with how one treats those individuals with whom one interacts and is involved. Therefore,

at a commonsense level, ethics relates to caring, fairness, openness and truth, which should be respected, while at a technical level, anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent are considered important in terms of the protection of participants. Therefore, this section will explain in detail the arrangements made for ethical issues.

All information provided by participants remained the property of the researcher and all responses were treated in the strictest confidence in this study. Children's, parents', teachers', and head teachers' names were not used other than for organisation of the raw data (UNESCO, 2004). Before working in any of the preschools, a detailed outline of the research, the methods and how the participants would be involved were explained and clarified.

Ethical issues were considered in the conduct of both interviews and observations in terms of the relationship between the researcher and respondents. As the interview respondents include parents, teachers, and head teachers, there were different relationships between the researcher and each group of respondents. When conducting interviews with parents, the relationship with them would be different from the relationship with head teachers. The relationships amongst respondents reflected their power relationships (Burgess, 1989). When conducting interviews, as Seidman (1998) suggests: a) the participants should be informed clearly of what they are being asked to do, by whom, and for what purpose; b) they should be informed of any risks they might be taking by participating in the research; c) there should be a clear indication that participation in the research is voluntary and the participants have the right to participate or not; d) the participants should be informed of their rights in the

process, particularly the right to review the material and the right to withdraw from the process; e) there should be an assurance of anonymity; f) there should be an indication of how the results of the study will be disseminated; g) there should be special conditions for children, which were recognised in this case when observing them in the classroom.

Throughout the whole research process, the researcher respected all the respondents; their ideas, feelings, and professional knowledge were treated appropriately. Confidentiality was assured to make sure that each respondent felt safe, at ease, and was able to speak freely. The researcher also ensured that the respondents' personal information, such as names, preschool names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses etc, were not disclosed. Children are the most significant stakeholders in preschool provision. Their behaviours were taken into account by observing teachers' activities and children's responses. Children's classroom responses and behaviours were an important part of the data of the research. According to James, Jenks, & Prout (1998), the researcher has to pay closer attention to the methods and techniques used in gaining children's perspectives because much of the children's social experience is structured by the adult world. In this study, before conducting observations, consent was gained from parents in advance on behalf of their children.

Conclusion

In this chapter, a detailed discussion and justification of the chosen research methodology has been presented. The research questions were re-addressed to

explain the objectives on which the research was designed, the sample was selected, and the field work was conducted. With clear research questions, it then went on to explain the reasons for adopting quantitative and qualitative approaches. The adoption of 'mixed-method' design (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) offered the best chance to obtain useful answers to the research questions. The use of a multiple case study approach within the quantitative and qualitative paradigm was also described.

The discussion of the pilot study then followed, and the relationship between the pilot study and final research design was presented. A detailed discussion of the conduct of the main study followed. The selection of the samples, the selection of research instruments, and the design of the research instruments was explained one by one. In this study, the case study strategy was used as an umbrella term within which questionnaire survey, documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured observations were carried out in four kindergartens representing both public and private settings.

The explanation of fieldwork procedures was also presented. In order to collect relevant data for this research, a two-part investigation was carried out: the first part of the investigation generated general data with quantitative information collected through a questionnaire survey from teachers and parents. The second part was designed to explore issues of implementation in more depth. In addition, obstacles to the collection of data and cultural factors were discussed. Through the discussion, an understanding of the conduct of current study on the basis of practical and cultural factors was obtained.

The explanation of the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was also

included. For quantitative data, a descriptive analysis was involved to generate quantified data. For qualitative data, a framework of organising, conceptualising, and theorising data was presented. Furthermore, issues in relation to identification and development of concepts, language, role of the researcher, research validity and reliability, and ethical issues were also discussed. In the following chapters a detailed presentation and discussion of data will be presented in order to make sense of the data collected through the fieldwork.

Chapter 4 Kindergarten Practices: the Implementation of Policy

Introduction

This chapter analyses how ECEC discourses contained in current policy are constructed, understood, and implemented in Chinese kindergartens. It focuses on the practice of teachers and head teachers, and the role of parents in terms of children's learning and development. It further engages with positioning their perspectives within discourses of implementing policy into practice. In so doing, this chapter conceptualises the data on the basis of both the theoretical and analytical framework and highlights the necessity of understanding current ECEC implementation and practice in relation to issues of traditional Chinese cultural perceptions of child rearing, as well as contemporary social, economic, and political transformation in the society.

Consequently, this chapter will mainly focus on examining the data in accordance with the research questions presented in the introduction. Firstly, this chapter intends to engage with issues related to the perception of ECEC at the higher policy level (i.e. national and provincial discourses) and the features of ECEC at the individual organisation level (i.e. each kindergarten). On the basis of administrative perspectives, it then continues the discussion of implementation of policy at the practical level to build up a picture of practice in terms of curriculum organisation, teachers' preparation and training, children's learning, and preparation for formal schooling. Following the discussion of issues in relation to research findings, the chapter will present in detail what

happens in actual settings in which Chinese ECEC policy has been translated into practice.

Examining the findings

In addressing the question: how is Chinese ECEC policy translated and put into practice in early years settings in Jiangxi province and how do head teachers, teachers, and parents perceive current ECEC policy and practice at the practical level? This section aims to present what happens in the four settings through examining the data collected. In this respect, the data will be organised into three themes: inputs, processes, and outcomes (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999) to examine how Chinese ECEC policy is translated and put into practice in early years settings in Jiangxi province. Subsequently, further presentations of how head teachers, teachers, and parents' perceive ECEC policy and how their perceptions affect their actions will be presented in the next chapter.

4.1 The standards of the kindergartens' practice: structural perspectives

In this section, the discussion of the input criteria (structural perspectives), which affect resources and organizational dimensions (i.e. the kindergarten environment, group size, teachers' training, and the curriculum) of each kindergarten (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999), focuses on the influence of official discourse of ECEC, the provision of each kindergarten, and the professional development of kindergarten teachers.

4.1a Influences of the official discourse on each kindergarten

The role of ECEC in enhancing children's overall development was not given much attention before 1980s, due to the historical, political, and economic background at that time (Zhu, 2002). ECEC was valued for its impact on intellectual development and preparation for school readiness (Chen, 2000). The idea of children's all-round achievement in terms of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development (*德，智，体，美全面发展*) has been promoted by the Chinese government and emphasised by central and local government and individual organisations (Chen, 2000).

Since 1980s, the Chinese government has introduced a series of educational laws which demonstrate their official concern for protecting young children's rights and improving the quality of ECEC. The idea of education promoted by the Chinese government is that it is the nation's responsibility to cater for the development of all children (National Congress of PRC, 1982). In 1986, concern for children's development was given even more emphasis through the Law for Compulsory Education (National Congress of PRC, 1986). This law states that the nine years of compulsory education will produce children who exhibit all-round development in terms of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic aspects. These children, therefore, will become a new generation with enhanced qualities of ideals, morality, a sense of humanity, and self-discipline (National Congress of PRC, 1986).

ECEC, as the essential component of Chinese basic education, has responsibility to promote the development of children at the early stage of

schooling (Zhu, 2002). New regulations and curriculum guidance were provided for kindergartens in order to improve this provision. However, although increased emphasis has been given to the idea of the 'whole-child' since the 1980s, there was no detailed guidance on how to achieve this goal in everyday practice. Subsequently, changes have been made since the issue of the Law of Education in 1995, which gave more detailed guidance for kindergartens. In this law, there is more stress on ensuring children's holistic development and detailed guidance on broad issues about the responsibility of the individual teacher in terms of ensuring children's health and safety as well as education.

Over the last two decades, an increasing number of official statements and policy have presented the idea of quality ECEC services (i.e. quality teaching and learning activities, and high learning outcomes). Implementing high-quality ECEC has been high on the national agenda and is stressed at both official and unofficial levels. As the Constructive Curriculum (2003) emphasised:

> The 20th century was the children's century; while 21st century is the century for children's development. Currently, constructing knowledge (构建知识) through five areas (i.e. language, science, health, society, and arts) is central to kindergarten education.
>
> (Constructive Curriculum, *幼儿园建构式课程指导*, p.I)

The interview data shows that the teachers and head teachers of the kindergartens in this study talked about their understandings of pre-school education in the sense which echoed the spirit of the official policy towards ECEC:

> The new curriculum provides 'a breath of fresh air' on children's development... this curriculum focuses more on children's overall

development which is as important as academic achievement.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

This curriculum is divided into five areas including language, science, health, society and arts... it reinforces children's language, imagination, and creativity through acting, performing, sometimes even from direct observation.

(Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

...the new curriculum emphasises children's personal and inter-personal skills and creativity through everyday activities... We have noticed that children's abilities have improved all-round.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

Furthermore, it was evident that the five areas of learning underpinned teachers' everyday planning. Kindergarten teachers tried to integrate these five developmental areas and to include them in daily teaching and learning activities.

The topic for the session today is about how to make a dark night bright... The teacher starts by telling a story of a mad doctor who tries to steal the moon from the sky. After the story, the teacher invites children to share their ideas about how to brighten the dark sky when there is no moon. She then moves on to a discussion about what the differences are between natural light and electric light. The session ends with an experiment of lighting bulbs using batteries, bulbs, and wires by each group of children.

(Observation Notes, oT12-07-1, K3)

A more detailed teaching plan (including aims, main teaching and learning activities, using the environment, working with parents, working within community, and observation) from September to January is presented in Appendix 6.

Though the official policy to encourage children's learning in all five areas has

been widely accepted and used in teachers' day to day teaching, it appeared that practical issues about how to carry this out were problematic.

> It is a good curriculum... but there are some aspects in this curriculum that are not very suitable for our kindergarten
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

> It is a good curriculum, but I think some aspects are not suitable for my class. Really, it is not based on the actual situation of the kindergarten...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-01, K1)

The wide diversity among cities has made the implementation of policy and organisation of curriculum more difficult as the policy making by its nature is problematic. In China, policies are usually made by the central government which monitors from an overall point of view. But insufficient explanation or guidance from the upper level (especially provincial level) has been provided to support and assist kindergartens and practitioners at the practical level to interpret and implement these policies (see Table 4-1, statistic data from Q17 in the teachers' questionnaire).

Table 4-1: Guidance for the teachers (frequency & percentage, whole sample)

	Frequency	Percentage
National guidance	50	52
Provincial guidance	36	38
Kindergarten guidance	72	75

The data show that the kindergartens in this study provide the most curriculum guidance to their teachers. Compared with provincial guidance, national guidance is used as alternative source of information for kindergartens.

4.1b The resources of each kindergarten

In Chinese culture, there is a strong belief in the influence of the environment on

the child's development. It is considered crucial for all-round healthy development that the child should have a high quality learning environment. Young children should be in a pleasant environment in order to ensure learning outcomes (Luo & Gilliard, 2006). A high quality learning environment has been given high priority in early childhood settings. In this section, a detailed discussion will be presented in order to show how Chinese kindergartens try to produce a suitable environment to enhance children's learning.

In this study, the resources of each kindergarten covers aspects such as administrative features (e.g. sources of funding), physical environment (e.g. wall decorations and classroom decorations), and facilities (e.g. teaching and playground facilities). Through the field work, the impact of resources on children's learning became apparent. As one parent wrote in the questionnaire, 'kindergarten should provide not only opportunities to learn and to play, but it should also create a whole atmosphere to underpin children's development' (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-39, K2).

In this respect, two dimensions are discussed which influenced the atmosphere created in each kindergarten: i) organisational features and ii) physical features of the environment. This discussion aims to identify implicit but powerful factors that influence children's learning.

Understanding organisational features of the kindergartens

Observations in kindergartens indicated that organisational features exerted a strong influence on both learning and management. Although all the kindergartens visited tried to provide the children with as many resources as possible, in actual fact the finance available imposed restrictions on kindergarten

management:

> ...the kindergarten is attached to the university and is financed by it. We recruit teachers and support staff if necessary. According to the university regulations, we can have 50 members of staff for whom the university will pay the salaries, bonuses, and other benefits.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

This statement shows that the source of funding was an important factor in the administration of a kindergarten. The situation was very different in the private kindergarten.

> ...Because this kindergarten is a private kindergarten, we don't receive any funds from local government; therefore, we can't afford to employ too many staff so we can't employ as many teachers as suggested in the Kindergarten Education Guidance.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

The observed differences between kindergartens can be explained through its organisational features (i.e. on average a large class size of 40 children and an average teacher ratio of 1:17). Differences in teachers' professional development, curriculum arrangements, and other relevant aspects were also identified in this research. A further comparative discussion of teachers' professional development, curriculum arrangements, parental involvement, and preparation for primary education will be included later in this chapter.

Building up an appropriate physical environment for children

As well as the issue of funding described in the previous section, the physical features such as the general environment, playgrounds, wall and classroom decorations, and facilities are also believed to have an impact on children's

learning (Chen & Liu, 2000; Bai, 2005; Luo & Gilliard, 2006). Observations of the kindergarten environment and facilities showed that regardless of organisational constraints, the kindergartens tried to create a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere (See Picture 4-1 & Picture 4-2).

Kindergartens visited in this research were decorated and well equipped both indoors and outdoors. Frequent themes for decoration included elements from children's popular culture, such as cartoon figures from children's television programmes, children's pictures, or handicrafts (see Picture 4-3, Picture 4-4, and Picture 4-5). The kindergarten decorations brightened the environment and introduced children into an environment with which they are familiar.

The most significant aspect observed when visiting the kindergartens was how naturally the Western child popular culture has permeated the Chinese kindergarten (e.g. Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Winnie the Pooh were commonly used for decorating walls). As mentioned in Chapter 2, such adoption of representation of Westernised child culture is an example of the new type of childhood that Chinese children are experiencing in China today.

Picture 4-1: Wall decoration

Picture 4-2: One of the facilities available for outdoor activities

Picture 4-3: Cartoon figures on the wall

Picture 4-4: Traditional Chinese stories on the wall

Picture 4-5: Paper drawings on the wall (*公鸡，太阳，珍珍幼儿园，和宝宝*)

Besides creating an environment appealing to children, kindergartens also made the most of the facilities available. It was observed that fulfilling children's learning needs was the central task of the kindergartens. Consequently, a multi-media classroom, drawing room, mirrored dancing room, and a library were available in the state kindergartens. However, facilities in the private kindergarten visited were more limited than those in the state sector, due to the financial constraints of the private kindergarten.

In general, regardless of administrative arrangements, the kindergartens visited were working on providing a positive environment within the buildings, classrooms, and playground. As well as creating an environment for children's learning, kindergartens in this research also organised various curriculum activities to enhance the 'quality' (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999) of teaching and learning. It is important to investigate what curriculum activities each kindergarten

conducted to further understand what happens in each kindergarten. Section 4.2 presents information on the curriculum organisation in each kindergarten visited.

4.1c Teachers' professional development

Kindergarten teachers have a direct impact on curriculum arrangements and planning the teaching activities. Their professional knowledge, experience, and understandings of early childhood education largely determined the decisions they made in daily practice. Kindergarten teachers are most familiar with systematically identifying, collecting, recording and analysing the evidence of how young children are learning and developing. Thus, the role of teachers in implementing the curriculum at classroom level is of great importance (Clarke, 1997; Fullan, 2001). By practically using such knowledge to deciding and designing the curriculum, kindergarten teachers managed children's learning and provided suggestions to enhance success and achievement.

Yet, without sound professional knowledge, kindergarten teachers will have difficulty in conducting appropriate teaching activities (Van Der Berg, 2002). They may find difficult to teach what they do not understand (Tang, 2004), (i.e. if they do not have relevant knowledge and skills to design and organise a curriculum, the further delivery may not be successful). Consequently, professional preparation and training becomes essential to enhance teachers' abilities to implement a curriculum. However, teachers seldom implement a curriculum exactly as stated in curriculum guidance (Ma, Lam & Wong, 2006). Rather, they tend to make their own practical interpretation of what to teach and how to teach it (Doyle & Ponder, 1976/77). This situation was reflected in the kindergartens visited in this research. As one of teachers from K2 explained,

> ...well, I think for the most part, the curriculum suits my classes very well but there are a few sessions I won't carry out because they are unsuitable and I don't consider them worthy of doing... when we have problems of curriculum implementation, we can raise it in teachers' meetings where we all discuss how to make decisions together.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

Another teacher from K1 also made a comment along the same lines, but felt frustrated about the irrelevance of curriculum contents and the suitability of certain topics in the curriculum.

> ...as you know, we don't have much snow in Nanchang, how can we make a snowman without snow? What I am doing now is to report my problems to the deputy head teacher who is in charge of the teaching plans. With her agreement, I skip those impractical sessions and make an alternative plan to modify those unsuitable plans in order to make them more feasible.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-01, K1)

She voiced her frustration to deal with issues and make suitable and context based learning experience for the children. The issue of the curriculum is not only based on children's experiences, it appears as an issue intersected with power. Being in a position to have to report to the deputy head teacher and ask for approval to choose topics which children can relate to, her disempowerment is apparent in the comments.

Teachers' interpretations of curriculum guidance and decision-making are affected by their experiences, knowledge, beliefs and perspectives on early years education and the training they have undertaken. In particular, professional training on curriculum understanding and implementation can enhance teachers' abilities to implement a curriculum (Zhu, 2002). In the

kindergartens visited in this study, teachers expressed similar ideas which show that they feel positively towards training. One novice teacher from K4 explained how teacher development activities helped her:

> ...for the first term of my teaching year, I was teaching together with our deputy head teacher. Normally, she took over most teaching responsibilities, while I helped organise the class and prepare teaching materials. Sometimes, I taught one or two sessions under her direction. Before each session, she monitored my plans and gave me suggestions for preparation. After each session, she gave me feedback which helped me to modify and make progress...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-03, K4)

A positive view of training was also given by one of the head teachers interviewed from K1. Unlike this novice young teacher, she, a teacher with more than 20 years' teaching experience, introduced various types of training for the teachers. It is notable that because this kindergarten is run by the university, it has special access to university expertise:

> We have three different training programmes, including kindergarten-based training; inter-kindergarten training and inter-province training... most teachers feel that these sessions are useful. They develop their teaching skills and curriculum understanding through learning, discussing, and comparing... we also invite lecturers from our university to talk about child development, to attend sample sessions, and to give suggestions for practice.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

In the Chinese context, teachers' practice has been significantly influenced by the high expectations on children and an achievement orientated culture. Under such circumstances, teachers' professional knowledge and experience are

considered vital to effectively implement policy and curriculum in practice. However, kindergarten teachers' training and professional development has long been given low priority compared with similar programmes available for teachers in primary and secondary levels. Consequently, when they start teaching in kindergartens, their original qualifications are comparatively low, thus reflecting the little emphasis placed on their training.

According to the teachers' questionnaire survey carried out in the kindergartens, 65% of all teachers originally graduated from kindergarten teacher training college. They obtained qualifications equal to a Certificate from technical secondary schools. Teachers with a Diploma Certificate at the beginning of their teaching career accounted for 20%. Only 5% of teachers completed university education before they became a kindergarten teacher. However, there are still 10% of teachers who did not have any qualification at all (see Table 4-2, statistic data obtained from Q7 in the teachers' questionnaire).

Table 4-2: Teachers' initial qualification (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Certificate	9	45	26	72	14	70	13	65	62	65
Diploma	5	25	6	17	5	25	3	15	19	20
Bachelor	3	15	1	3	1	5	0	0	5	5
No qualification	3	15	3	8	0	0	4	20	10	10
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

It was also found that the highest percentage (83%) of teachers trained to teach children aged 3 to 6 years old; whereas, just over 10% of teachers initially trained for the 0 to 3 age group. None of the teachers in the study had trained to teach children older than 6 years (see Table 4-3, data from Q8 in the teachers' questionnaire).

Table 4-3: Initial age group (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Birth to 3 years	2	10	0	0	0	0	9	45	11	11
3 to 6 years	17	85	31	86	20	100	11	55	79	83
6 to 12 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	1	5	5	14	0	0	0	0	6	6
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

The kindergarten was the main provider of various in-service training programmes for teachers to enhance their understanding of the curriculum and to improve their teaching abilities. According to questions 9 & 10 in the teachers' questionnaire, 84% of the teachers had received additional training for working in the early years' provision (see Table 4-4).

Table 4-4: Additional training received (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	19	95	32	88	19	95	11	55	81	84
No	0	0	2	6	1	5	8	40	11	12
Missing	1	5	2	6	0	0	1	5	4	4
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

However, for 90% of the teachers, the additional training programmes were provided by the kindergartens themselves. About 43% of teachers had obtained a Diploma since their original qualification, while 13% of teachers had obtained a Bachelor's degree. Some teachers, just under 10 %, were still working towards a Diploma, and 7% of teachers were in the process of studying for a Bachelor's degree. However, there were still 12% of teachers who had not had any training since graduating from their original teacher training colleges (see Table 4-5 & 4-6).

Table 4-5: Additional training completed by the teachers (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In-service	9	45	19	53	8	40	4	20	40	42
Short course	7	35	14	39	5	25	5	25	31	32
Diploma	6	30	15	42	15	75	5	25	41	43
Bachelor	4	20	5	14	3	15	0	0	12	13
Master	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4-6: Additional training still being followed by the teachers (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In-service	1	5	3	9	1	5	4	20	9	9
Short course	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	1
Diploma	4	20	3	8	1	5	1	5	9	9
Bachelor	1	5	4	11	2	10	0	0	7	7
Master	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

From Table 4-5 and 4-6, a clear difference can be seen between state kindergartens and the private kindergarten on the issue of professional development. The tables show that in K4 the average rate of improvement in qualification was lower than in the other three kindergartens. According to the head teacher of K4, the training issue has long been a concern in this kindergarten:

> ...we have been struggling with the teacher training issue since the establishment of the kindergarten. As you know, this kindergarten does not receive any funds from the government; we cannot provide our teachers with as much training as those in state kindergartens.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

It seems that the lack of resources for training in the kindergarten has comparatively reduced teachers' access to pursue higher degrees. A noticeable difference in the number of teachers reading for higher degrees was found between K4 and the other three kindergartens. Unlike the other three

kindergartens, no teachers in K4 were studying for Bachelor's degrees or have gained Bachelor's degrees. A plausible reason for such differences could be that the expectation of training and professional development was relatively lower in comparison with that in state kindergartens. Moreover, a closer examination of discourses of teachers from state kindergartens showed better understanding of the curriculum, as follows:

> This curriculum is divided into five areas covering language, science, health, society, and arts. The curriculum addresses each area through careful design which makes teaching and learning more flexible. In particular, it reinforces children's language, imagination, and creativity through acting, performing, sometimes even from direct observation. These five areas are interconnected with each other.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

The situation in K4 was different from other kindergartens as it was found in K4 that 65% of the teachers believed that teacher training activities were those provided as in service-training by the kindergarten, as indicated by Q18 in the teachers' questionnaire, whereas 35% of teachers did not think they had received any training related activities (See Table 4-7).

Table 4-7: Attending teacher development activities (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	20	100	34	94	19	95	13	65	86	90
No	0	0	0	0	1	5	7	35	8	8
Missing	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

A plausible explanation for this situation is provided in the statement made by a teacher from K4:

> ...I don't know if those can be classified as training...for the first term of

> my teaching year, I was teaching together with our deputy head teacher... sometimes, I taught one or two sessions under her direction. Before each session, she monitored my plans and gave me suggestions for preparation. After each session, she gave me feedback which helped me to modify and make progress... I also attended teachers' meetings on Wednesdays with other teachers where I could raise questions...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-03, K4)

This suggests that in K4 there were no formal activities which served the purpose of professional development. It seems that no clear information was provided to explain how professional development and training would be given to the teachers. In this respect, the head teacher's explanation, as given in her interview, seemed to be very different from the teachers' interpretation:

> ...we cannot provide our teachers with as much training as those in state kindergartens. I would say that among those private kindergartens in our city, what we do is ranked at the top.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Generally it seemed that state kindergartens provided more training and professional development activities for teachers, whereas the private kindergarten had difficulties in providing such activities, due to their financial constraints, as explained in Chapter 1.

4.2 Using process criteria to understand the kindergartens' performance

The understanding of individual kindergartens' performance will focus on what actually takes place in the settings, such as the organisation of the curriculum, the children's activities, and the relationship between the kindergartens and the parents (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999). This section will consider how the curriculum is

organised, the learning that takes place, teachers' attitudes towards children and teaching, and parental involvement and degrees of satisfaction.

4.2a How the curriculum is organised

In order to understand ECEC policy implementation, it is important to examine how the curriculum is organised and the extent to which the curriculum activities impact on children's overall learning. The curriculum used in China by all kindergartens aims to promote children's moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development (Zhu, 2002). Through kindergarten education, children are expected to obtain the knowledge and skills needed for formal schooling (Liu, 2000a). The need to organise suitable activities for young children has grown in each kindergarten in response to social and parental demands for what is considered as high levels of achievement.

Liu (2000a) reported that there were no guidelines for the organisation of kindergarten educational activities in Chinese ECEC settings. Although Chinese kindergartens are regulated by the Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001), it is each individual kindergarten's responsibility to decide why to teach (curriculum aims), what to teach (curriculum contents), when to teach (curriculum timing), and how to teach (teaching plans and learning activities) (Liu, 2000a). Each kindergarten therefore organised their curriculum activities accordingly.

The discussion of curriculum organisation in this chapter will include i) curriculum arrangement on the basis of the general requirements of the five areas of learning; ii) arrangements for involving parents in children's learning; and iii) arrangements to promote the kindergarten in the 'market' (Zhu, 2002).

General arrangements for the five learning areas

The newly developed Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001), which has been in operation for the last six years, provides new guidelines for kindergarten teachers to foster moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development at ages 3 to 6. The curriculum, developed by the Shanghai Huadong Normal University (*上海华东师范大学,* 2002), was designed on the basis of the new Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001). It specifically deals with fostering children's intellectual development and preparation for formal schooling. So far this newly-developed curriculum has been widely used in kindergartens within Jiangxi province, and is considered in high regard by most practitioners:

> ...the curriculum we currently use is a very systematic one, which aims to develop children step by step through five areas of learning... this curriculum successfully helps teachers reinforce these areas through carefully prepared activities.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

Most importantly, it enables kindergarten teachers to combine the five learning areas (i.e. health, language, science, society, and arts) and to provide a holistic physical and psychological approach to the development of young children. An example of an activity combining motor coordination with number skills can be seen in this observation:

> the topic for today's session is about how the little mice moves eggs (balls are used as eggs) ...The teacher starts by explaining the instructions about how the game will be carried out ...She then demonstrates how to move the eggs from one side to another...She then ties a basket round every child's waist and divides 25 children into five groups. She invites some children to demonstrate the process of relay race. Finally, the game

starts and the teacher asks each child to move a different number of eggs (from 1-10) each time when they run from one side of the classroom to the other. She encourages the children to run as fast as they can and to collect as many eggs as they can ...The session ends after the children have moved all their eggs from the big basket and each group of children counts the number of eggs in their baskets.

(Observation Notes, oT12-01-1, K1)

Although kindergarten education has received significant attention recently, there are issues arising when putting the curriculum guidance (2001) into practice. On the one hand, the content of the curriculum does not reflect the structural conditions of provincial settings, and thus class teachers are expected to take responsibility for preparing and running the sessions according to the resources available locally; on the other hand, the guidance provided for implementation is mainly from the kindergartens' own informal interpretation of such guidance. Therefore, one way of interpreting it can differ greatly from setting to setting, as follows.

We provided a teachers' book for each teacher which helps them to prepare and evaluate their activities. Each teacher has the opportunity to visit other kindergartens that are using the same curriculum. In order to evaluate each teacher and their classes, we require each teacher to hand in their preparation and plans every month. There is a deputy head teacher who is responsible for monitoring the teachers' class preparation and arrangements. In addition, we ask each teacher to write an annual review covering her understanding of the curriculum, teaching activities, parental feedback, children's achievements, personal development, and perspectives for future work.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

Kindergartens can modify the contents of the curriculum and plan activities to

avoid problems.

> ...most of the contents suit my class well, but there are a few sessions I won't carry out because I don't think they are suitable...we have staff meetings where we discuss which sessions can be skipped.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

Although the importance of pre-school education has been widely acknowledged, there are noticeable differences between private and public sectors. Teachers from state kindergartens have adequate training and have clearer views about policy and the curriculum. These teachers have sufficient practical experience to plan and carry out the daily activities. However, teachers from the private sector seem to have less understanding about policy and curriculum and less experience of planning teaching activities. Differences between kindergarten locations also influence the implementation of curriculum. As the head teacher from the private kindergarten explained:

> ...Adopting a new curriculum means not only introducing a new concept, but all kinds of follow-up activities have to be undertaken. Take teacher training for example, we have been struggling with it since the establishment of this kindergarten. As you know, this kindergarten does not receive any funds from the government, so we cannot provide our teachers with as much training as those in state kindergartens. I would say among the private kindergartens in our city, the training we do is ranked at the top. Nearly every year, we send one or two teachers to visit kindergartens or attend meetings in other areas, sometimes even in other provinces...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

A distinct contrast emerged with head teachers and teachers from the state sectors:

...we set up relevant facilities, for example, a multi-media classroom, a multipurpose room, and a library were set up according to the curriculum guidance. For teacher preparation, we've devoted great attention to teacher training... three different training programmes for each teacher including kindergarten-based training, inter-kindergarten training, and inter-province training have been introduced...

(Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

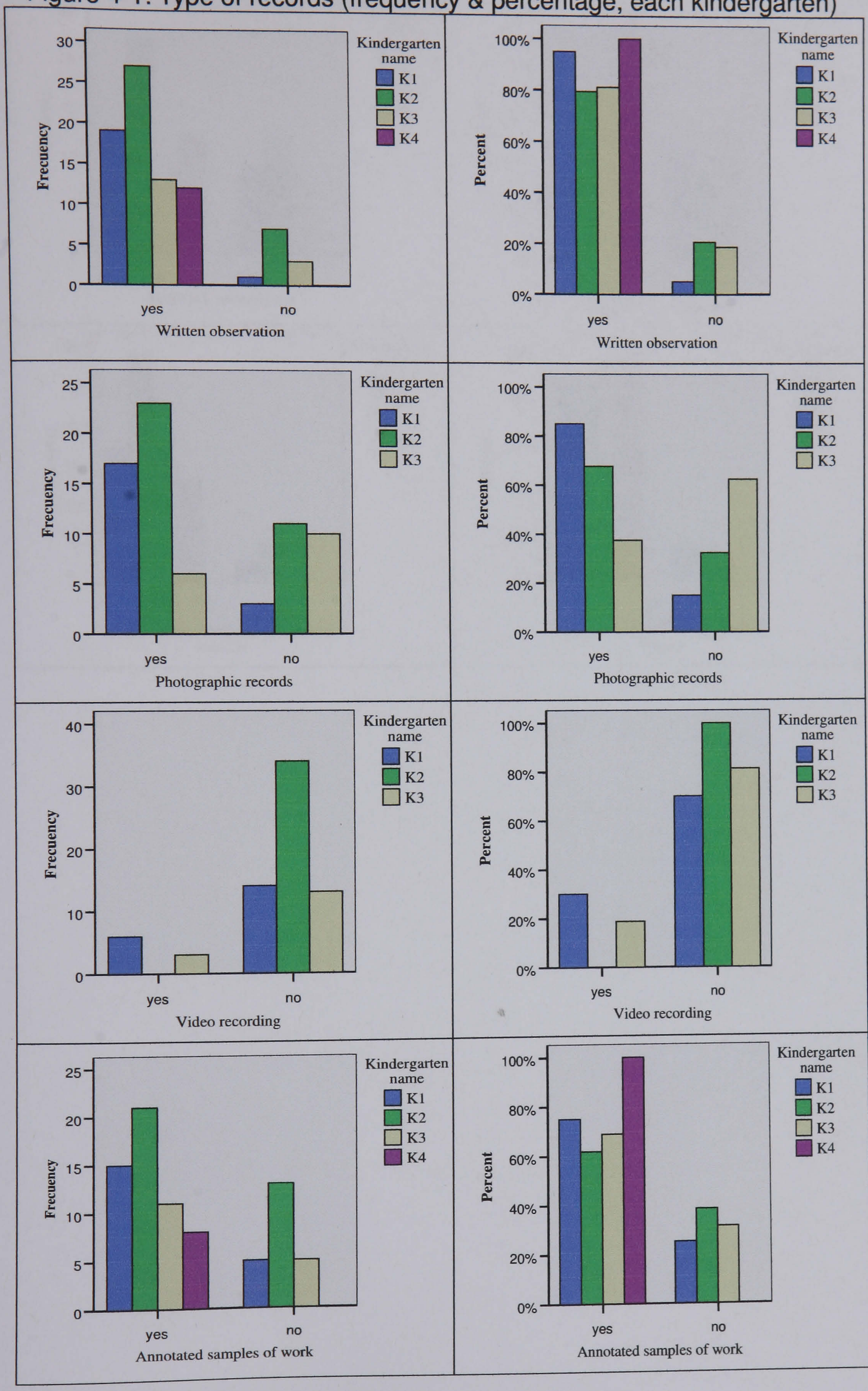
One teacher from K2 described her experiences when adopting the new curriculum, which reflected a similar situation described by the head teacher from K1.

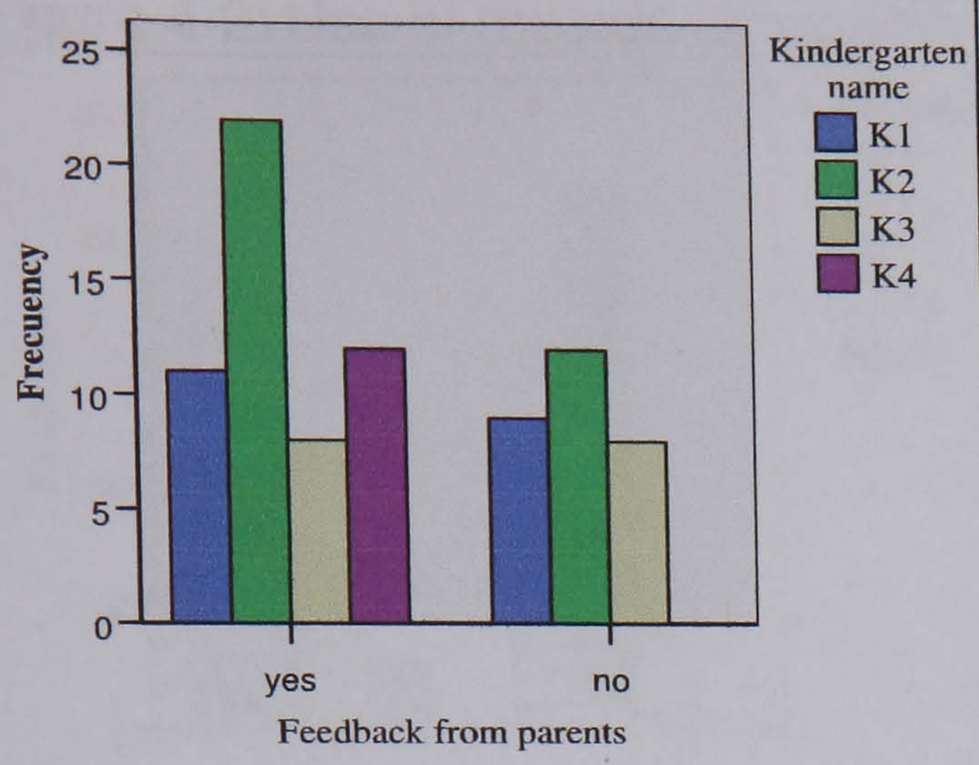
...our kindergarten was one of the first kindergartens to use the new curriculum. In order to give teachers an overall picture of the curriculum, we had two weeks of training... now we have staff meetings every week in which we can discuss curriculum related problems, we learn from each other, and we attend sample lessons, give feedback, have a discussion based on the sample lesson...

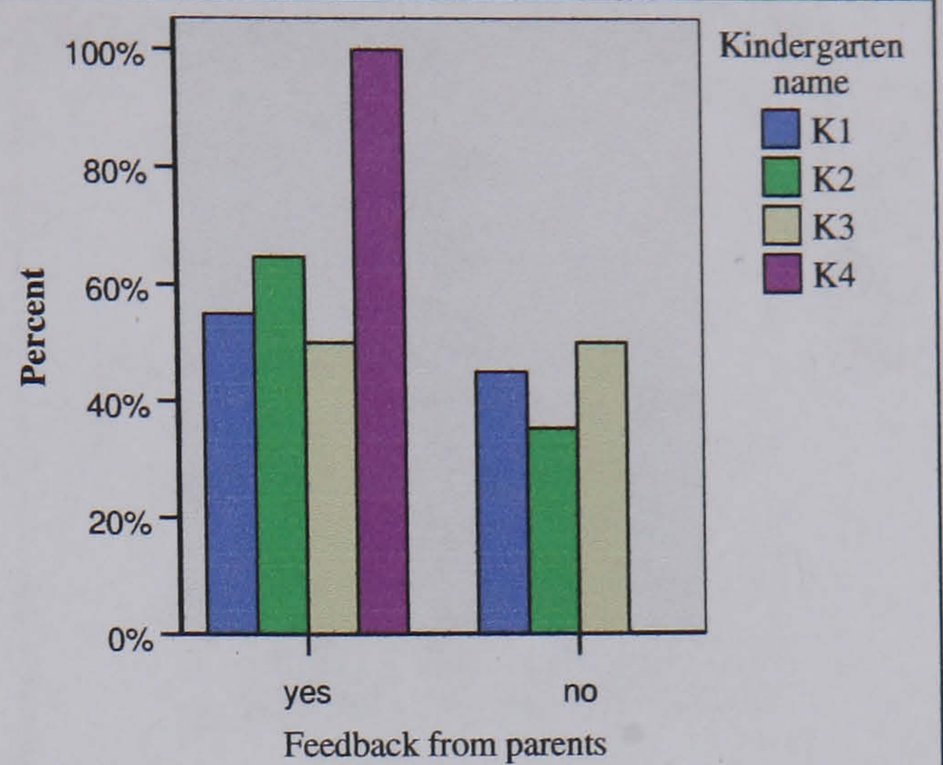
(Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

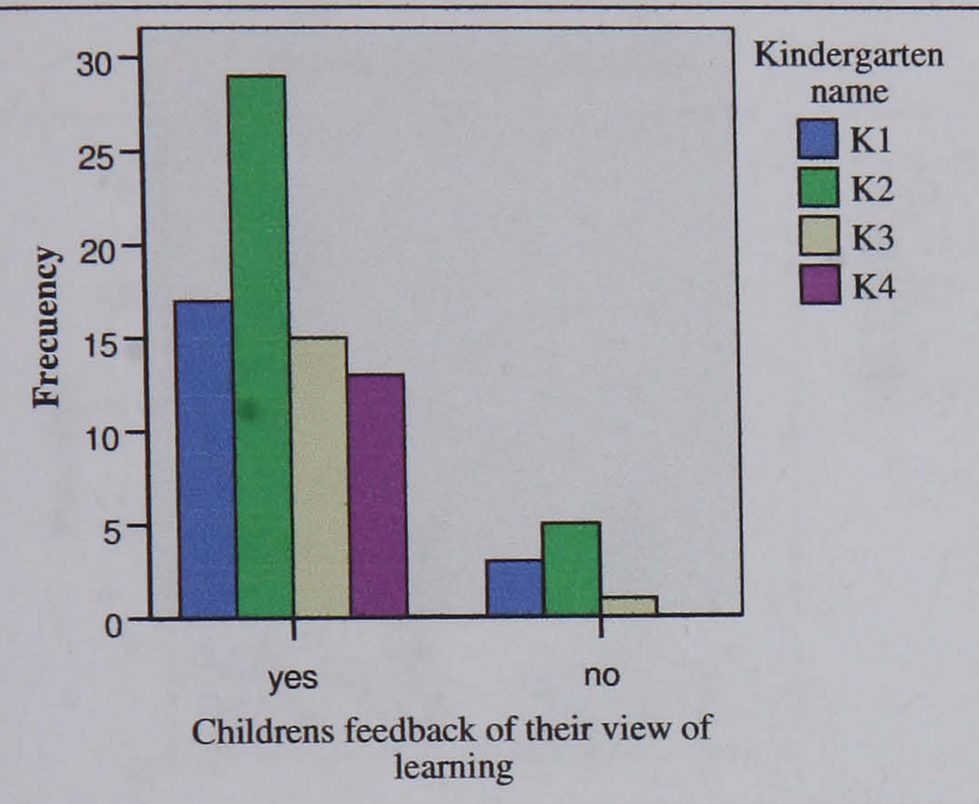
Thus, it appeared that the effect of different locations has rather less impact on curriculum implementation than the administrative and funding managements. Although different locations had an impact on kindergarten facilities, the number of children, and children's socio-economic backgrounds, the organisation of teaching and learning activities was uniformly similar. Findings from the questionnaire survey on how children's learning is recorded and how those records are used illustrates the relatively small differences between each kindergarten (see Figure 4-1 & Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-1: Type of records (frequency & percentage, each kindergarten)




Frecuency
25
20
15
10
5
0
yes
no
Feedback from parents
Kindergarten name
K1
K2
K3
K4


Percent
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
yes
no
Feedback from parents
Kindergarten name
K1
K2
K3
K4


Frecuency
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
yes
no
Childrens feedback of their view of learning
Kindergarten name
K1
K2
K3
K4

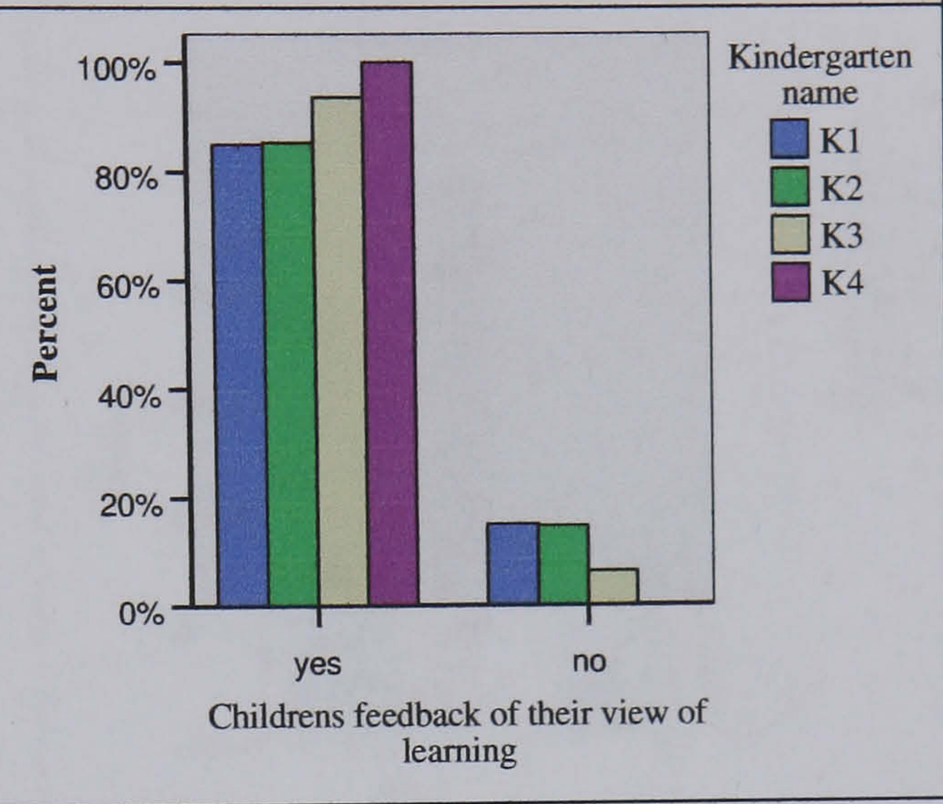
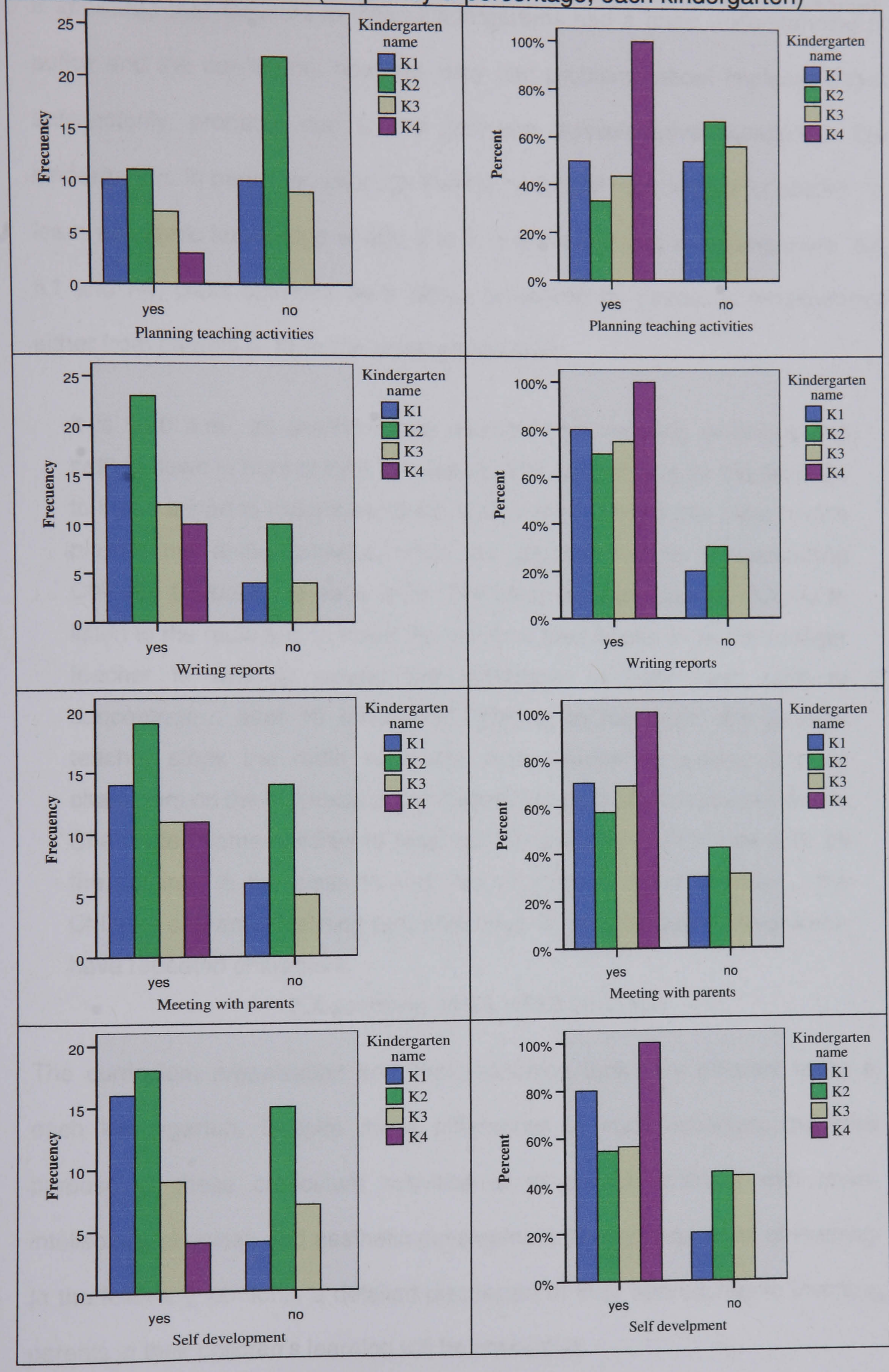

Percent
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
yes
no
Childrens feedback of their view of learning
Kindergarten name
K1
K2
K3
K4

Figure 4-2: Use of records (frequency & percentage, each kindergarten)



It appeared that teachers in these kindergartens had a basic understanding of policy and the curriculum; however, they had problems about implementing it satisfactorily, probably due to the particular administrative situation in the kindergarten. In particular, although there is no official requirement for children to learn academic knowledge at age 3 to 6, it was clear that in kindergartens like K1 and K4, class activities were highly influenced by academic requirements either from parents or from the kindergarten itself:

> It is 9.20 a.m., all children have returned from morning exercises and settled down in front of their little tables. They are waiting for the teachers to make a start to today's sessions. One of the teachers (the older one) is playing the audio cassette, while the younger teacher is distributing Chinese textbooks to each child. The older teacher asks all children to listen to the radio and to follow the words in their books while the younger teacher is walking around the classroom to help each child to concentrate... after 10 minutes of listening to the radio, the younger teacher stops the radio while the older teacher is writing Chinese characters on the blackboard... she starts to teach children the characters. She invites some children to read out the characters. She then asks all the children in the class to read the characters aloud together... the Chinese character learning part ends after 20 minutes when the children have repeated characters.
>
> (Observation notes, oT12-02-1, K1)

The curriculum organisation and implementation took very different forms in each kindergarten. Despite these differences in implementation, the main purpose of these curriculum activities is to provide children with moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development through five areas of learning. In the following sections, a detailed discussion of their approaches to involving parents in their children's learning will be presented.

Raising the profile of the kindergarten

Although the Kindergarten Education Guidance (2001) has provided an overall regulatory framework for Chinese kindergartens, it is each individual kindergarten's responsibility to organise its curriculum. On the one hand, a variety of teaching and learning activities are organised to provide children with basic moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development as suggested in the Guidance. On the other hand, each kindergarten is responsible for modifying the contents of the curriculum in order to meet its own needs. Each kindergarten also organises activities to involve parents in their children's learning and to satisfy parental expectations. Besides these general curriculum arrangements, each individual kindergarten has developed special activities to promote itself.

The non-statutory nature of Chinese early childhood education permits Chinese parents to choose which kindergarten their children attend, which inevitably makes Chinese kindergartens competitive, and each kindergarten has to compete for enrolment which affect their profits. Under these circumstances, Chinese kindergartens look for special ways to be distinctive, in order to compete and to attract parents' attention. The kindergartens selected in this research employed different promotional activities with such aims.

In terms of special curriculum arrangements, the teaching of English was the most common in the four kindergartens. For Chinese parents, bilingual skills are seen as one of the essentials for their young children's future success. Influenced by such a view of the value of English language, all kindergartens in this study provide children with early English learning experiences; however, their reasons for doing so largely related to the purpose of targeting parents'

attention. The task of teaching English at the kindergarten level seems problematic as there are no effective teaching methods underpinning the teachers' practices. As a result, English language teaching was very variable:

> Today's session is to teach children two English phrases: sit down and stand up... the teacher starts by dancing while singing an English song. The teacher asks all children to dance and sing together with her... She then moves to explain the meaning of these two phrases. While she reads out the two phrases, she tries to do the corresponding action ... She then invites children to read out the phrases to make sure they have the right pronunciation. After learning the meaning and the pronunciation, the teacher leads children to play a game called 'phrases and actions'... the whole session ends after children are given a chance to lead the 'phrases and actions' game and the teacher helps with correcting their pronunciation and organising them to take turns.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-10-1, K4)

In this session, the teacher was trying to motivate children's English language learning through engaging them in play activities. Whether the children understood the teacher or not, this session showed that the children followed the teacher's delivery of the lesson. Another observation of an English lesson presented a very different approach to teaching English. It seemed that the learning outcome can be problematic due to the particular teaching style used:

> The English session for today is to teach the children six different fruit in English... the teacher starts the session by asking the children to watch the video tape... the teacher then asks them to follow the video tape and read in chorus again and again... after about 20 minutes, she stops the video tape and asks them to open their textbooks and to read the text together... the session ends up with reciting the text.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-11-1, K4)

Several kindergarten teachers pointed out the importance of English language because of its increasing popularity in recent years as an international language. As well as teaching children basic English phrases, the kindergartens in this research arranged other special courses for children to learn artistic performance such as dancing or singing.

> The session today is to practise the old dancing performance – if you are happy and you know it clap your hands, and to learn a new dance – little swan... The teacher starts to help each girl to stretch the body including legs and waists... It took about 15 minutes for both the teacher and the children to warm-up and be fully stretched. She starts the music and asks all children to dance with her. After dancing, the teacher dances the new song. She told all girls to pay attention to both her actions and the music... Each girl practises each action by following the teacher. They practise each action one by one... The whole dancing session finishes with the practice but the girls haven't had the chance to dance with the music.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-05-2, K2)

According to the dance teacher, the goal of this dancing class is to help children with high body coordination to practise them through dancing, to enhance their dancing skills, and to express their feelings through dance. Additionally, it promoted the kindergarten as having a special programme to fostering children's artistic talents.

Similar examples were seen in another two kindergartens (K1 & K4) where different activities were promoted. A teacher from K1 explained the contribution that such special activities can make to children:

> There is an interconnection between children's learning outcome and activities available... we believe that when children who have special

skills take part in various activities, they have an opportunity to develop their skills and extend their talents.

(Interview Notes, iT3-01, K1)

Another session, 'a little dew', aimed to develop children through a wide range of abilities including language, comprehension, imagination, and performing. The teacher believed that this session fostered children's learning by offering them a chance to express ideas based on personal interpretation and to perform imaginatively. In those kindergartens, outdoor activities are also regarded as one of the special curriculum arrangements which enhance development informally. An example observed can illustrate this:

> It is 8.07 in the morning; as usual children are arriving at the kindergarten gradually. Instead of staying inside the classroom, the children start to play in the playground with the teachers... The children choose whichever activities they like. Some of them play football, some of them play 'you throw I catch' game, some of them play badminton, some of them play 'the eagle catches little chicken' with their teachers... more and more children start to play in the playground. Some parents even take part in the activities... It is 8.50, all the playground activities have ended and the children tidy up the playground and go back to the classrooms.
>
> (School Observation, K3)

According to the head teacher of this kindergarten, the morning activity has been carried out since 1986. Each child has the chance to choose activities they are interested in. In her words, by taking part in such activities, children tended to develop significant social skills by interacting with peers and teachers. Moreover, negotiation ability through listening, cooperation, competition, and self-esteem were also developed through these self-initiated activities. She also believed that the relationship between the teacher and the children improved when teachers

played with the children. Allowing free choice had a positive impact on children's development, which complemented the formal curriculum input.

In order to develop distinctive features while also to offer a wider range of learning opportunities, some kindergartens developed specialist extra-curricular activities organised after school hours. For example, one of the kindergartens visited (K3) provides performing, calligraphy, drawing, and drama classes. A similar example is also found in K2 which offers performing, dancing and singing, and chess classes for children. As this kindergarten is famous for its artistic programmes, classes like performing, dancing and singing are the most popular activities. K1 (the university-run kindergarten) presents its own special programmes. Children in this kindergarten have the opportunity to join the brass band, to take part in the gymnastic group, and to join the table tennis club. Because of the university backup, the kindergarten can easily organise these activities with the help of professionals. The brass band of this kindergarten, for example, has earned awards in competitions and an increasing recognition, valued by parents.

Compared with state kindergartens, the only private kindergarten (K4) visited in this study provides pottery-making, performing arts, and language classes. The head teacher of this kindergarten explained that the main purpose of extra activities is to widen children's knowledge. For example, through pottery-making, children can familiarise themselves with the making process through hands-on experience. In addition, they believed that no matter whether children are good at making pottery or not, the main purpose of this class is to provide children with the opportunity to enjoy the process of making porcelain, to be creative, and to

learn more about the traditional industry of their hometown, as porcelain manufacture is one of most important industries in Jiangxi province.

To sum up, the implementation of policy and curriculum guidance can be very different and take various forms. However, no matter what the arrangements are, these arrangements serve the same purpose, that is, to enhance children's development, involve parents, satisfy parental expectations, foster formal school readiness, and promote the kindergarten.

4.2b Learning at the kindergarten

The investigation of the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level inevitably involved the examination of what happens in kindergartens. Therefore, particular attention has been given to children's kindergarten learning including the activities available and the learning outcomes. A picture was built up of how learning activities were organised for children and how their learning outcomes were monitored.

The activities planned for children

The term 'activities' in this research refers to 1) regular daily activities provided by teachers in classrooms or in the playground; 2) particular activities offered when time, space, and materials allowed. In Chinese kindergartens, teachers are encouraged to develop various activities to enhance children's learning. However, because kindergarten teachers were facing the pressure of heavy workloads, taking care of too many children, and having problems carrying out class activities with such large numbers of children, kindergarten teachers tried to share workloads by dividing children into groups.

Generally, two teachers share a class of at least 35 children. Both teachers are expected to take the responsibility to care for and educate children. Each teacher took responsibility for preparing different teaching activities to share the load. Three forms of activities were planned daily: whole class, small group, and individual activities. Responses to Q 24 in the teachers' questionnaire gave the following results (see Table 4-8, 4-9 and 4-10):

Table 4-8: Percentage of time spent in whole class activities (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
10% of time	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
20% of time	0	0	4	11	0	0	0	0	4	4
25% of time	0	0	3	8	0	0	1	5	4	4
30% of time	2	10	10	28	0	0	4	20	16	17
35% of time	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	5	3	3
40% of time	6	30	10	28	2	10	1	5	19	20
50% of time	6	30	2	6	4	20	3	15	15	16
60% of time	1	5	1	3	2	10	2	10	6	6
70% of time	1	5	3	8	0	0	7	35	11	12
75% of time	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	2
80% of time	1	5	0	0	5	25	0	0	6	6
90% of time	0	0	0	0	4	20	0	0	4	4
100% of time	0	0	0	0	2	10	0	0	2	2
Missing	0	0	3	8	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

Table 4-9: Percentage of time spent in small group activities (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0% of time	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	3	3
10% of time	0	0	0	0	5	25	2	10	7	7
15% of time	0	0	0	0	4	20	0	0	4	4
20% of time	2	10	7	19	1	5	6	30	16	17
25% of time	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	5	3	3
30% of time	9	45	11	31	4	20	5	25	29	30
35% of time	1	5	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	2
40% of time	4	20	6	17	2	10	4	20	16	17
50% of time	2	10	6	17	1	5	1	5	10	11
60% of time	0	0	2	6	0	0	1	5	3	3
Missing	0	0	3	7	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

In order to balance the pressure placed on each teacher, various arrangements were made including dividing children into groups to share the workload. According to the questionnaire findings presented above, teachers from these kindergartens employ different strategies in managing the class and conducting activities. However, about 20% of questionnaire respondents used whole class activities (taking up more than 40% of class time) as the major grouping strategy. One third, about 30%, of respondent teachers used 30% of class time for small group activities; while 28% of teachers used 20% of class time for children's individual activities. About 19% of teachers agreed that they used 10% of class time for individual activities.

Table 4-10: Percentage of time spent in individual activities (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0% of time	0	0	2	6	6	30	0	0	8	9
5% of time	0	0	0	0	4	20	0	0	4	4
10% of time	3	15	4	11	2	10	9	45	18	19
15% of time	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	5	2	2
20% of time	11	65	4	11	6	30	6	30	27	28
25% of time	0	0	1	3	1	5	0	0	2	2
30% of time	3	15	11	31	0	0	2	10	16	17
35% of time	0	0	3	8	0	0	2	10	5	6
40% of time	0	0	5	14	0	0	0	0	5	6
55% of time	0	0	3	8	0	0	0	0	3	3
60% of time	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Missing	0	0	3	8	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	20	100	36	100	20	100	20	100	96	100

Only 9% of respondents did not allow time for individual activities in the classrooms. It was also found that 53% of teachers used up to 20-35% of class time for small group activities. Therefore, in the following part of this section, an account of how teachers carried out small group activities will be presented. Additionally, a description of children's self-initiated activities in kindergarten

classrooms will also provide insights.

Although teachers reported that a large percentage of the time was spent in whole class activities, this does not mean that teachers did not arrange other forms of classroom organisation. Small group activities were carried out as one of the supplementary strategies prepared by kindergarten teachers. The respondents claimed that different grouping strategies were seen as a positive way to organise classroom. According to these teachers, children seemed to be more motivated in small group activities, and with fewer children the teaching process became more interactive. In order to carry out small group activities, children were grouped according to different criteria including ability, gender, age, interests, and motivation both in the classrooms and the playground.

The questionnaire data showed that grouping by ability was the most popular strategy and was widely used by teachers in both classrooms and the playground. Almost two thirds of teachers (63%) indicated that they grouped children by ability in the classroom. Furthermore, 61% of teachers reported that children were also groped by ability in the playground. It was also found that although altogether a high percentage of teachers used ability grouping, the percentage of teachers who employed this strategy varied in each kindergarten (see Table 4-11, data from Q23 in the teachers' questionnaire).

Table 4-11: Number of teachers who reported using ability grouping in the classroom and playground

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Classroom	14	70	23	64	12	60	12	60	61	63
Playground	10	50	25	69	11	55	13	65	59	61

Besides grouping by ability, gender was also one of strategies that the teachers

often used. About 17% of respondents from all the kindergartens used gender approach as a basis for grouping children in the classroom, and slightly fewer teachers (13%) employed this approach in the playground. Other than ability and gender, a series of strategies based on children's age, interests, and other spontaneous arrangements were used by teachers in the classroom and in the playground (see Table 4-12).

Table 4-12: Reported grouping in the classroom and playground (frequency & percentage)

Classroom	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
By age	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	2	2
Other grouping	2	10	7	18	4	20	2	10	15	16
Playground	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
By age	0	0	2	6	2	10	1	5	5	5
Other grouping	5	25	5	14	4	25	2	10	17	18

Although some respondents considered grouping children by ability to carry out small group activities, such an approach can be problematic in terms of defining children's ability. A child can be a high achiever in one subject, for example literacy, but low in another, for instance numeracy. It is difficult to measure achievement in young children. As a result of that, the ability approach can be inappropriate in terms of grouping children unless additional information can be obtained to substantiate the meaning of ability.

4.2c Teachers' attitudes and teaching skills

In Dahlberg *et al.* (1999), 'behaviour of staff' was regarded as an aspect which focuses on how staff behaviour can impact on the quality of early childhood education. In this study, emphasis has been placed on teachers' attitudes and teaching skills by the kindergartens. In this respect, teachers' attitudes and

teaching skills were also analysed.

Teachers' attitudes and their teaching skills are the most direct and powerful influence (Li & Xiao, 1997) in the classroom. Using various teaching skills and materials, teachers tried to impact on children's behaviours and learning:

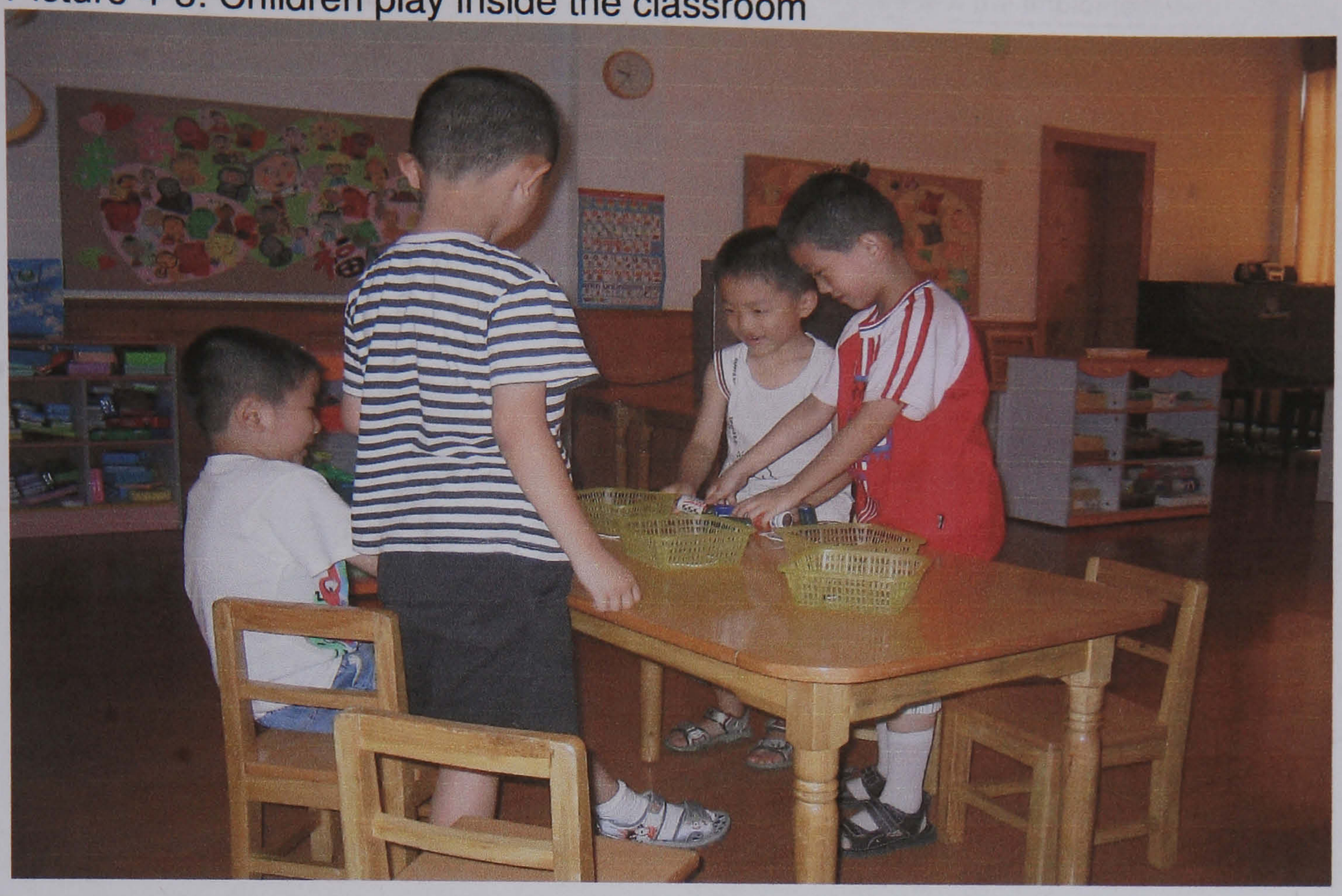
> It's 15.30 in the afternoon, children of *Xiao yi ban* (3-4 year olds) are back from after-lunch nap, sitting on their little chairs, and listening to the teacher... the teacher starts to tell a story – 'go to school happily'. This is a story about one little girl who likes kindergarten and every day, one of the things that makes her happy is to go to school... after the story, the teacher says that she noticed that a few children cried when their parents left them. She asks why they felt sad when the parents left and if they are going to cry tomorrow... finally, the session ends up with children promising that they won't cry on the following day.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-04-2, K2)

According to the teacher, children often felt sad about their parents' departure, especially when they were left in an environment (classroom) they are not familiar with. She used a story in order to help children understand that the reason their parents left them is not because they don't want them anymore and that the kindergarten is a place like home where children can meet more children, make friends and have fun. Teaching strategies, similar to the above example which aims to influence children's behaviours and learning, were given significant importance by other teachers as well. Furthermore, in each kindergarten, teachers tried to make the kindergarten homely. Children, therefore, felt more comfortable to be part of it (see Picture 4-6, Picture 4-7 and Picture 4-8).

Picture 4-6: Classroom decoration

Picture 4-7: Corridor decoration

Picture 4-8: Children play inside the classroom



Teachers' attitudes towards children and their sense of responsibility towards the job also influenced the interactions between teachers and children. Through classroom observations of following two English sessions, there was evidence that teachers' attitudes can influence their way of teaching:

> The English session today is to teach children the names of six different fruits in English… the teacher starts the session by asking the children to watch the video tape of the session… the teacher then asks the children to read after the video tape again and again… after about 20 minutes, she stops the video tape and asks children to open their textbooks and to read the text together… the session ends up with reciting of the text.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-11-1, K4)

For the whole session, the teacher asked the children to keep reading after the video tape, to read together with the tape, and to recite. Although all children took part in the teaching process, the whole teaching and learning process seemed to be lacking in interest and interaction between the teacher and the

children. Could learning and teaching process become more interesting? The answer is positive. The English session can be very different as one teacher from K2 proved:

> Today is the first day after summer vacation, the teacher starts the session by welcoming the children and reintroducing them to their old friend – Melody (a hand puppet). Melody also greets the children and asks them about their summer vacation... some children share their experiences... the teacher pretends to ask Melody what is the topic of the session, Melody then introduces the task of the day - to learn an English song – I'm a little tea pot. The teacher starts to sing the song while she tries to do some actions along with each lyric... The actions are simple and easy to learn. After the children know how to do it, the teacher asks them to do the actions while she sings the song... After two practices, the teacher starts to explain to the children the meaning of the song and teach key words in this song... she then sits down in front of the piano and starts to teach children to sing. She asks the children do the actions while singing the song... the whole session ends up with the teacher and children singing and dancing together.
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-06-2, K2)

According to the teacher observed, the first session when the children come back from the summer vacation is always tough as the children are distracted and do not find it easy to concentrate. As a result, the teaching activities need to take this factor into consideration. This teacher said that children were more willing to take part in the teaching activity when they felt interested. Therefore, it is important to carefully design the teaching activities in order to motivate their learning enthusiasm.

Regardless of whether each teacher was highly motivated in their jobs, kindergartens provided support in order to improve teachers' attitudes towards

children and teaching, responsibility to the job, and their teaching skills. Consequently, they provided training programmes to motivate teachers and increase their enthusiasm; they issued guidance to enhance teachers' behaviours and attitudes towards children, and provided support to teachers whenever they needed it. However, it seemed challenging to motivate teachers in terms of their career attitude and teaching skills as many teachers and head teachers had negative perceptions of their jobs. A detailed discussion of teachers' perspectives on ECEC will be presented in the following chapter.

4.2d Parental involvement and satisfaction

In general, Chinese parents have high expectations for their children's success in both academic life and their subsequent jobs (Chan, 2004). They have a set of firm beliefs about children's early development, which largely shape Chinese parental attitudes towards children's learning. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese parents tend to feel highly responsible for their child's learning (Ho, 1986). It is generally expected that Chinese parents will be involved in their children's learning from kindergarten onwards. Under these circumstances, Chinese early childhood centres always provide opportunities to involve parents in their daily practice and in so doing to build up a consistent learning experience for the young children.

As a result, parent involvement programmes in each kindergarten were planned to integrate parents into their children's learning. Various forms of activities including parents' meetings, parents' days and evenings, parents' classes, and many other activities are organised. An example of a parent-child activity day in K2 was observed:

7.45 a.m. the playground of this kindergarten is getting crowded with parents, grandparents, and children. Today is a special day when parents are invited to take part in activities organised by the kindergarten...

8.30 a.m. the parent activity day formally starts after the head teacher addresses everyone in assembly and welcomes all parents... Parents then are grouped according to their children's classes. Some of them are led to classrooms where they participate in children's learning activities, while others remain in the playground. Those parents in the playground are split into three groups: one group is doing gymnastic activities with their children taught by a teacher. Each child takes responsibility for teaching the parents all the actions while the teacher helps when necessary; another group is doing a three-legged race. Two teachers are tying the parents' and the children's legs together while the other teacher is working as the referee; the other group of parents is drawing pictures with their children...

11.50 a.m. the whole morning ends when parents are invited to talk to the teachers in classrooms.

(Kindergarten Observation, K2)

This example shows how the parental activity day was organised so that parents had an opportunity to share their children's kindergarten experiences. But sometimes, particular activities were organised to meet parental expectations, which related to what some parents wrote in their questionnaires – that they want to know more about the kindergartens. Parents gave positive feedback about these activities, as one of parents said in an interview:

...every now and then, we get information from the teachers inviting us to attend activities and events. Sometimes, they ask for help in terms of organising activities, or asking permission for particular events (for example, a day trip). They also send us invitations to attend special events each term which I think is a very good way of creating an

atmosphere in which parents are included in the kindergarten and it shows that they appreciate the opportunity to communicate with parents as well as in parents' meetings.

(Interview Notes, iP3-02, K2)

Involving parents in children's learning in kindergarten served the purpose of meeting parental expectations, which is seen as very important by Chinese early childhood sectors. Both parents and teachers in this research recognised that parental involvement in children's learning was essential and good communication and understanding between parents and teachers was desirable:

> ...I would like to know as much information as possible to compare my son's physical, intellectual, learning abilities, etc. with other children in the class. I also would like to know about lunch recipes every week as in the evening we can make different food to give him more nutritious choices. The most important information I would like to have is about children's behaviour and study results every month... Although we want our kid to be academically successful, we are concerned about his overall well-being. So we pay more attention to developing his social skills and positive study habits. We tend to ask for relevant information from teachers so that we can monitor his education at home and in the kindergarten...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-27, K1)

The head teacher from K4 gave a more detailed rationale for the role of parent-kindergarten relationships to ensure children's learning and development:

> ...we have worked on many ways to communicate with parents. As a result, we've built up common ground with the parents about ideas on educating and caring for children. The parents say that if they agree with our approach they won't change kindergarten, because it takes time for the children to get used to another kindergarten. They feel comfortable

> with what we are doing to involve them in care and education...We want to build up a unified approach to the children's education so that they will not be treated differently when they get home. Because they only spend a few hours in the kindergarten, what they do at home has a big influence on their behaviour. So it depends on parents and it is important for them to know what we are doing in the kindergarten
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

As explained in Chapter 1, Chinese kindergarten education does not belong to the Chinese nine-year compulsory education. For that reason, parents have to pay for early years education and they are regarded as customers by some kindergartens because they can change the kindergarten if they are not satisfied with what it provides. As a result, parents are always willing to play an active role in the children's kindergarten, to get their rights as customers. This situation has led to kindergartens making special arrangements to meet their demands. In order to ensure parental satisfaction, the kindergartens visited in this study made explicit demands on their teachers when dealing with parents. The head teacher of K4 gave her views on the importance of parents' satisfaction for the kindergarten:

> It is essential for a private kindergarten to build up a good relationship with parents because they decide whether to send their children to us. We find parents are a group of people who are difficult to deal with. Nowadays, there is so much information available about teaching and caring for young children. Practically every parent has lots of information about early education. That makes our jobs even harder as some of them try to use their knowledge to assess how well we do our jobs... because they pay for it, they feel they deserve the best services, so we do our best to satisfy them... However, it can be very hard to find a balance because they can be very demanding and sometimes don't show us much respect... We want all our teachers to be patient and polite when talking to parents. With

all these efforts, we seem to have built up a good relationship with parents.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Although these views were expressed by a head teacher from a private kindergarten, the situation in state kindergartens can be very similar:

> ...it is very important to have parents' support. You know, nowadays, parents want to know everything about their children. They will often ask about their child learning, eating and sleeping, playing, and their behaviour here. What we do now is provide as many opportunities as we can for parents to understand what we are doing and what their children are doing. For example, every term we have an open day when parents can stay in the classrooms to take part in activities with their children. In the summer term when the weather is nice, we organise an activity day for parents and children... well, I think parents like our arrangements and they are quite satisfied, otherwise they would tell us.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

To be a kindergarten teacher, as most of them pointed out, is not a simple job, because a kindergarten teacher has to be patient, careful, open-minded, flexible, and hard working. Some teachers stressed that being a kindergarten teacher can be tough because kindergarten teachers have to teach in a different way from teachers in primary or secondary schools because they have to care for children at the same time as teaching them. They also pointed out that, given their responsibilities and workload, the salary for kindergarten teachers is generally low. This situation did not improve their motivation for self improvement, professional development, and enhancement of teaching skills. One teacher reported that she had considered changing jobs when the situation allowed:

> It is not easy to be a kindergarten teacher. Most people think it is a fairly easy job, no pressure and no demands. But that is all wrong. I feel a lot of

> pressure to do the job... I am currently doing MA courses and I hope I can make a change as this is not the job what I want for my whole life...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-03, K1)

Regardless of these difficulties, it is still stressed by kindergarten teachers that in order to do their jobs appropriately, they need to build up positive relationships with parents, manage the dynamics of teaching and learning, and enhance their professional skills. Most parents in this study seemed satisfied with the kindergartens and the teachers:

> In general, we are satisfied with what they are doing in the kindergarten. A variety of activities are available to the children. Communications have been set up between us and teachers which enable parents to play a part in their children's development. This is good, although, I feel more needs to be done to make the education more systematic.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-23-18, K3)

> The general feeling I have is that the overall quality of teaching programmes and teachers have been improved. Take my daughter's teacher as an example. The teaching philosophy she is currently using is more progressive and systematic which makes a big difference to my daughter. As I can see, her overall abilities have improved. She is happy every day.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-42, K2)

Although the emphasis on parental satisfaction and involvement may have originated with the goal of keeping parents from changing kindergarten, it has become an essential element in ensuring good communication between the kindergartens and parents. Consequently, according to Q19 in the teachers' questionnaire (the teachers were asked to indicate as many forms of communication as possible); parent meetings or formal written information has

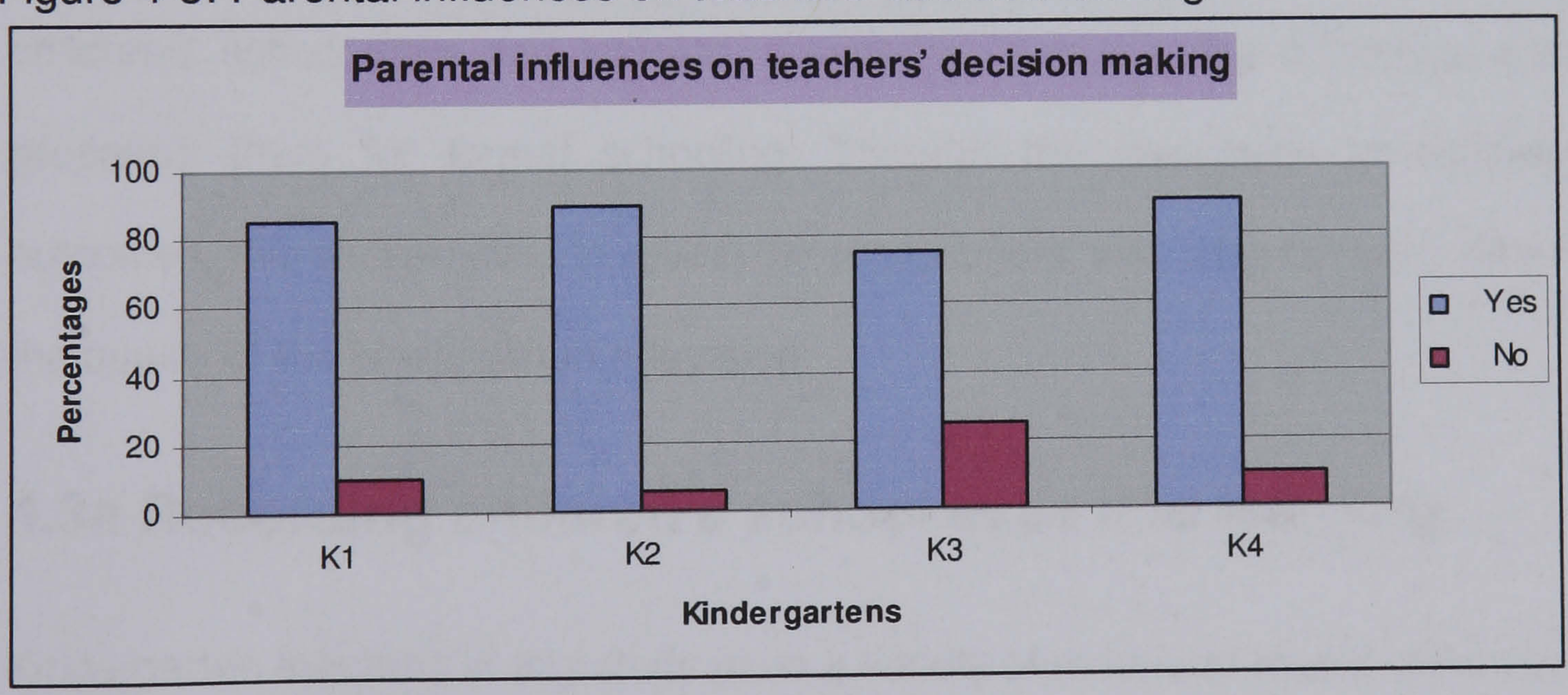
become the main methods for teachers to communicate with parents (see Table 4-13).

Table 4-13: Communication with parents through different forms (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Written information	16	80	34	94	16	80	14	70
Meeting	20	100	28	78	12	60	10	50

Parents are also invited to participate in daily teaching activities, to organise a parents' association, to organise meetings to communicate with teachers and kindergarten heads, or to help teachers organise children's out-of-school activities. While each kindergarten valued and welcomed parents' involvement and took notice of their suggestions, this did not necessarily mean that parents exerted an influence over teachers' decision making and planning. According to Q20 in the teachers' questionnaire, the situation was more or less the same among the four kindergartens (see Figure 4-3)

Figure 4-3: Parental influences on teachers' decision making



According to Q19 in parents' questionnaire, most parents surveyed pointed out that the opportunities to communicate individually with teachers were infrequent (see Table 4-14). This may be due to the fact that teachers did not consider

individual interviews to be the best strategy to communicate with parents as different parents have different demands. It was also found that in state kindergartens there were a few parents who believed that they were excluded from children's learning and kindergarten lives. However, this was not the case in the private kindergarten (K4).

Table 4-14: Parents reporting the need for more information (frequency & percentage)

	K1		K2		K3		K4		Total sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	37	95	52	95	22	96	47	94	158	94
No	2	5	2	3	1	4	3	6	8	5
Missing	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	39	100	55	100	23	100	50	100	167	100

On the whole, it was found that the need to ensure parental satisfaction through involving parents in teaching and learning activities was recognised by teachers.

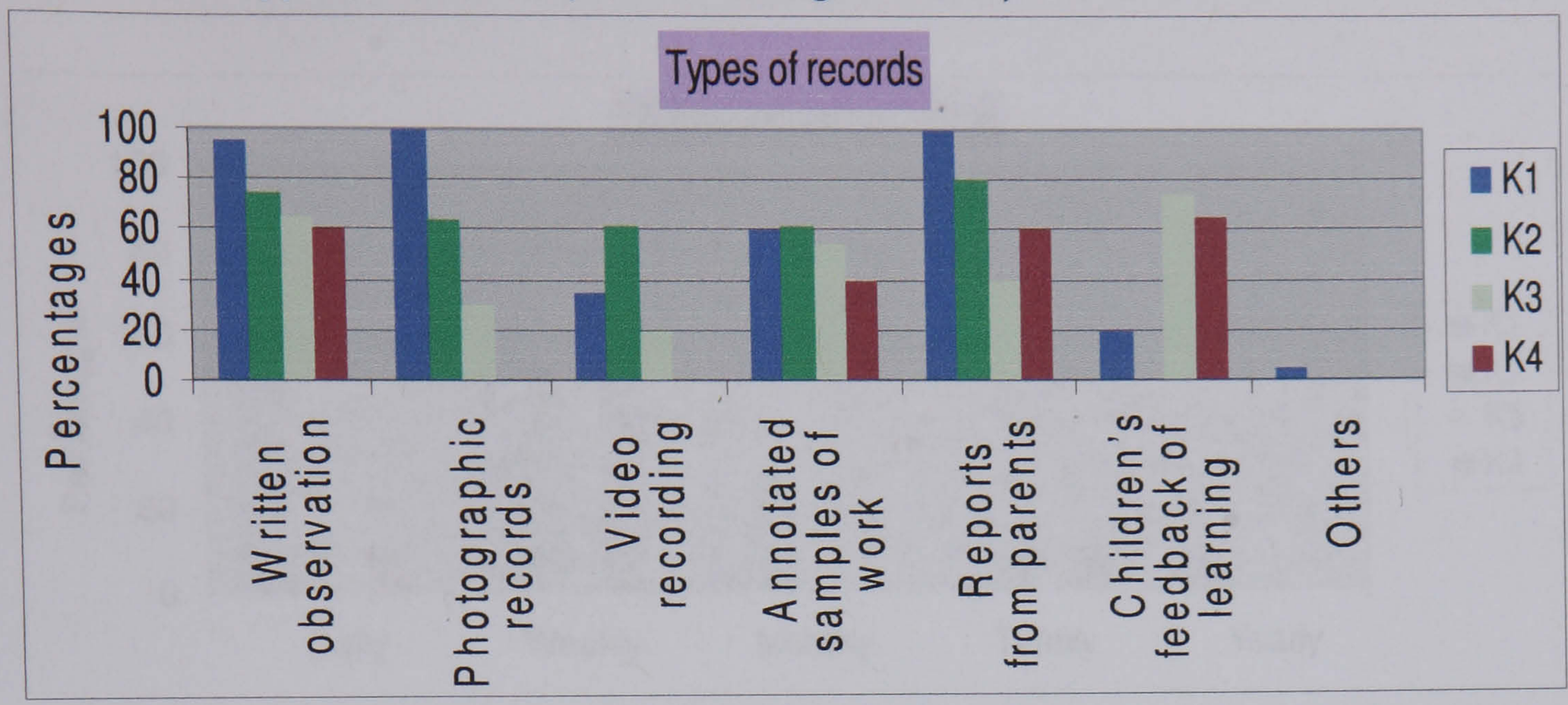
4.3 Monitoring children's learning outcomes

The evaluation of children's learning outcomes in this section includes recording children's school lives and learning, monitoring their learning outcomes, and preparing them for formal schooling. Through the discussion of learning outcomes, this section aims to reveal the practitioners' and parents' views about the quality of the kindergarten education.

4.3a Recording children's school lives and learning

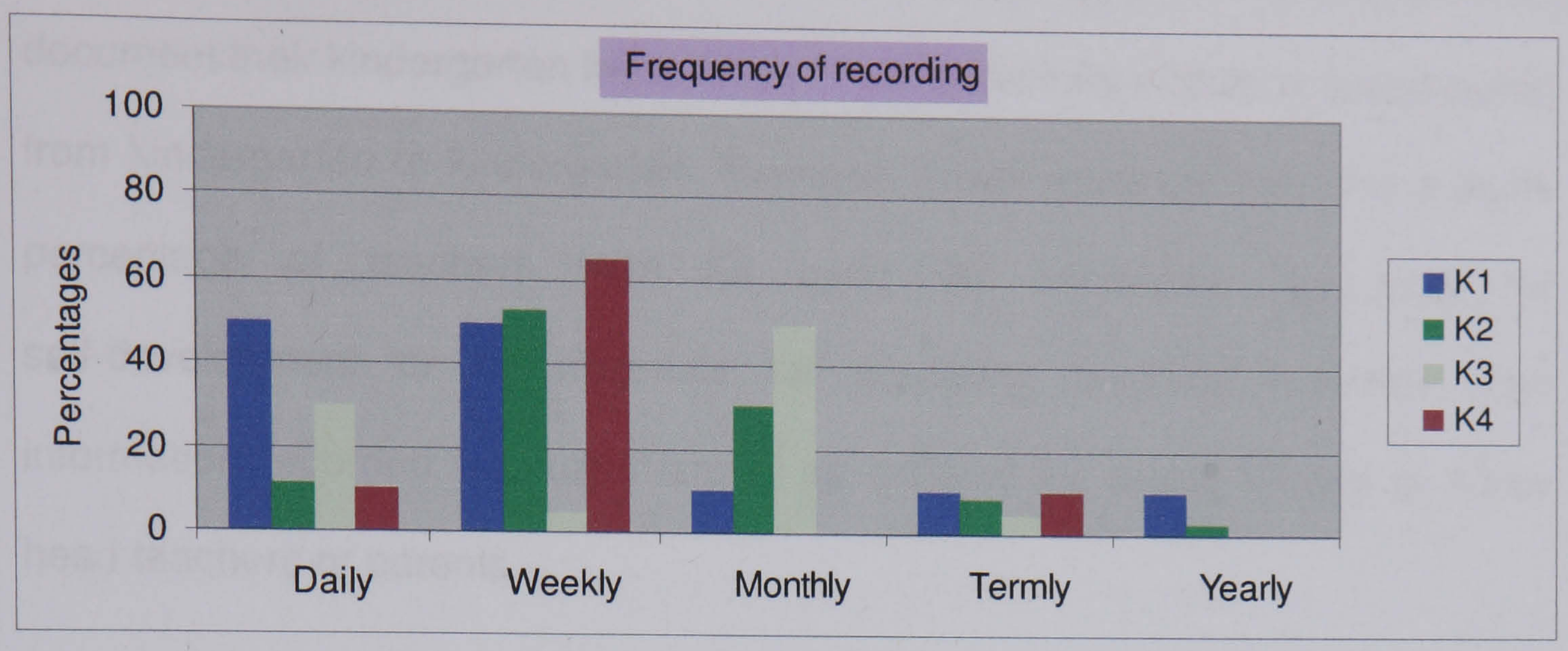
Kindergarten teachers in this study used a variety of means to record children's learning, school lives, and for many other purposes in relation to the children (see Figure 4-4, Figure 4-5 & Picture 4-9).

Figure 4-4: Type of records (each kindergarten, %)



Picture 4-9: Photographic records of activities

Figure 4-5: Frequency of record keeping (each kindergarten, %)



The purpose of keeping children's records and information varied from teacher to teacher. Two thirds (64%) of teachers kept information and records as first hand materials to write reports; over half the teachers (57%) used records as useful information when meeting with parents and discussing their children's learning; one third of teachers (32%) planned their teaching activities based on the records they kept; and just under half teachers (49%) believed children's records and information were essential and important for themselves in terms of professional development (see Table 4-15).

Table 4-15: Use of children's records (frequency & percentage, teachers' views)

	Total sample	
	N	%
Planning teaching activities	31	32
Writing reports	61	64
Meeting with parents	55	57
Self development	47	49
Other	2	2

These were marked differences in the frequency, type, and use of recorded information among the kindergartens. One fifth of teachers from K3 and K4 reported that they did not record any information on their children. Differences between state kindergartens regarding types of records were also observed. In

the private kindergarten, the teachers did not keep any pictures of children to document their kindergarten lives. Ways of using the information recorded varied from kindergarten to kindergarten. However, it was apparent that only a small percentage of teachers from K4 used the information as tools for self-development or as materials for preparing teaching activities. The information recorded was used largely as material for writing reports to either head teachers or parents.

4.3b Children's learning outcomes

Children's learning outcomes, a highly emphasised indicator of success, has long been the concern of Chinese kindergartens and parents. However, the term 'learning outcomes', here, does not necessarily mean academic achievement: it has broader meanings, including personal and social skills, language and communicative skills, scientific understanding of the world, creative and imaginative thinking, and physical development (Chen & Liu, 2000). It was found that almost all the questionnaire respondents and interviewees in this study agreed that monitoring children's learning outcomes is essential. As one respondent pointed out in the questionnaire:

> The new Guidance has provided an overall framework and direct instruction to early years educators. As indicated in the Guidance, early childhood education is the foundation of life-long learning which aims to build a foundation for a child's whole life. We kindergarten teachers are working to cultivate children with all-round development through appropriately-designed and organised activities. Additionally, we put children's achievements in self-esteem, self-confidence, social and teamwork abilities, on the top of the agenda.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-01, K2)

Some teachers also mentioned children's achievements as an illustration of the role of kindergartens and teachers. As one teacher explained:

> ...recently, early childhood education has changed greatly. Kindergartens have changed from a place for dancing and singing to a place for knowledge and for preparation of primary schools and further to a place to cultivate achievements in moral and ethical development. Kindergarten teachers, thus, take responsibility for making these changes happen. Children's achievements can be the best indicator of our jobs.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT95-20-17, K3)

Observations in these kindergartens also indicated that teachers have worked on enhancing children's achievement and reporting to parents. Reporting children's kindergarten lives and achievements will be further discussed in the next section. It was observed that some kindergartens visited, especially state kindergartens, translated learning goals into carefully designed activities:

> The aim of today's session is to make a paper doll. The teacher starts the session by distributing scissors, crayons, white and coloured paper, and glue. The teacher then asks the children to make a doll in whatever way they like... the children start to draw, cut, stick... During the making process, the two teachers walk around to answer questions and to give help if necessary... 45 minutes later, the teacher asks each child to put their paper dolls on a big table and asks them to explain the design for each ...
>
> (Observation Notes, oT12-02-1, K1)

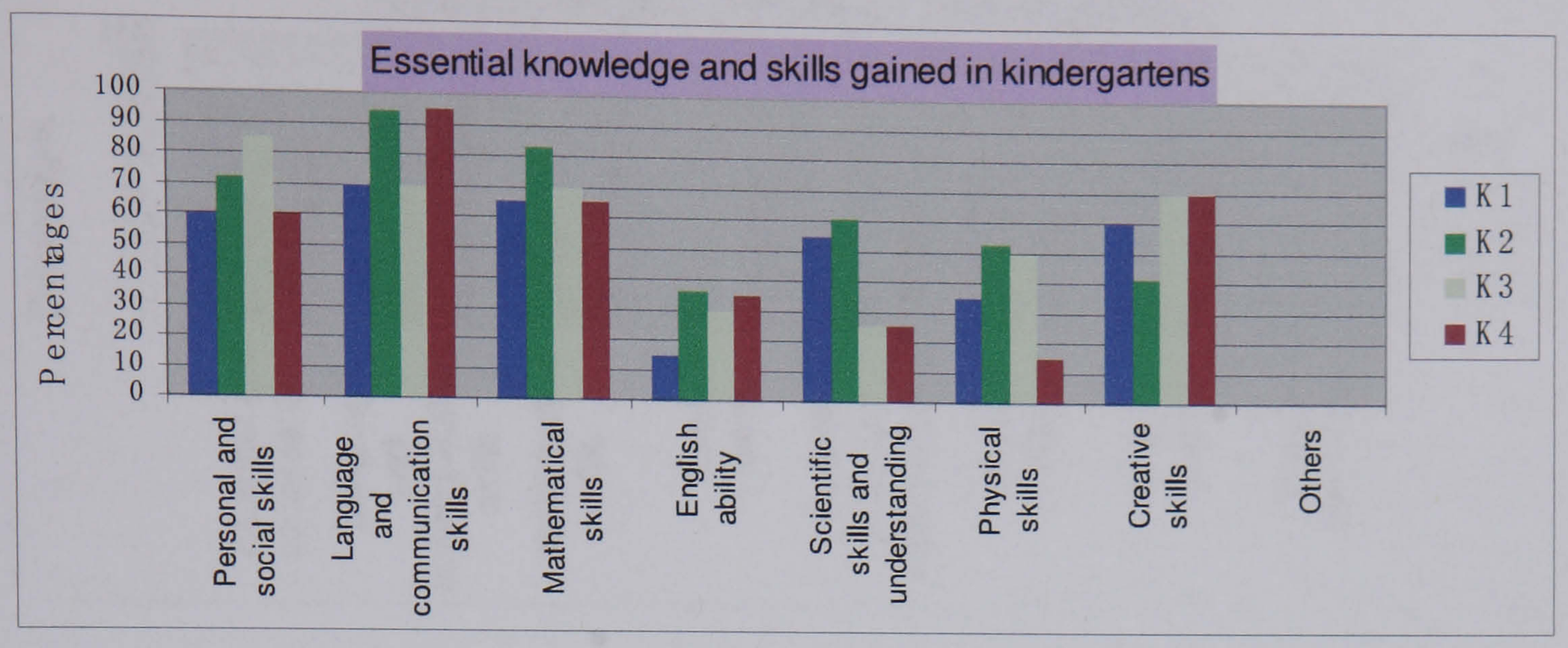
It was explained by the teacher that the aim of this handicraft session was to put children's imagination into practice through painting, cutting, and putting bits and pieces together. According to her, through this training, children's colour recognition, fine motor coordination, and imagination was enhanced. Additionally,

through explaining their design, children developed their language skills as well. Each child was able to make a nicely designed, highly individual piece. This approach is illustrated by one teacher's statement in the questionnaire:

> Over the past decade, enormous changes have been observed in Chinese early childhood education. Currently, the model of teaching has changed from 'I teach, you follow' to children thinking and learning through systematic teaching and learning plans.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-40, K2)

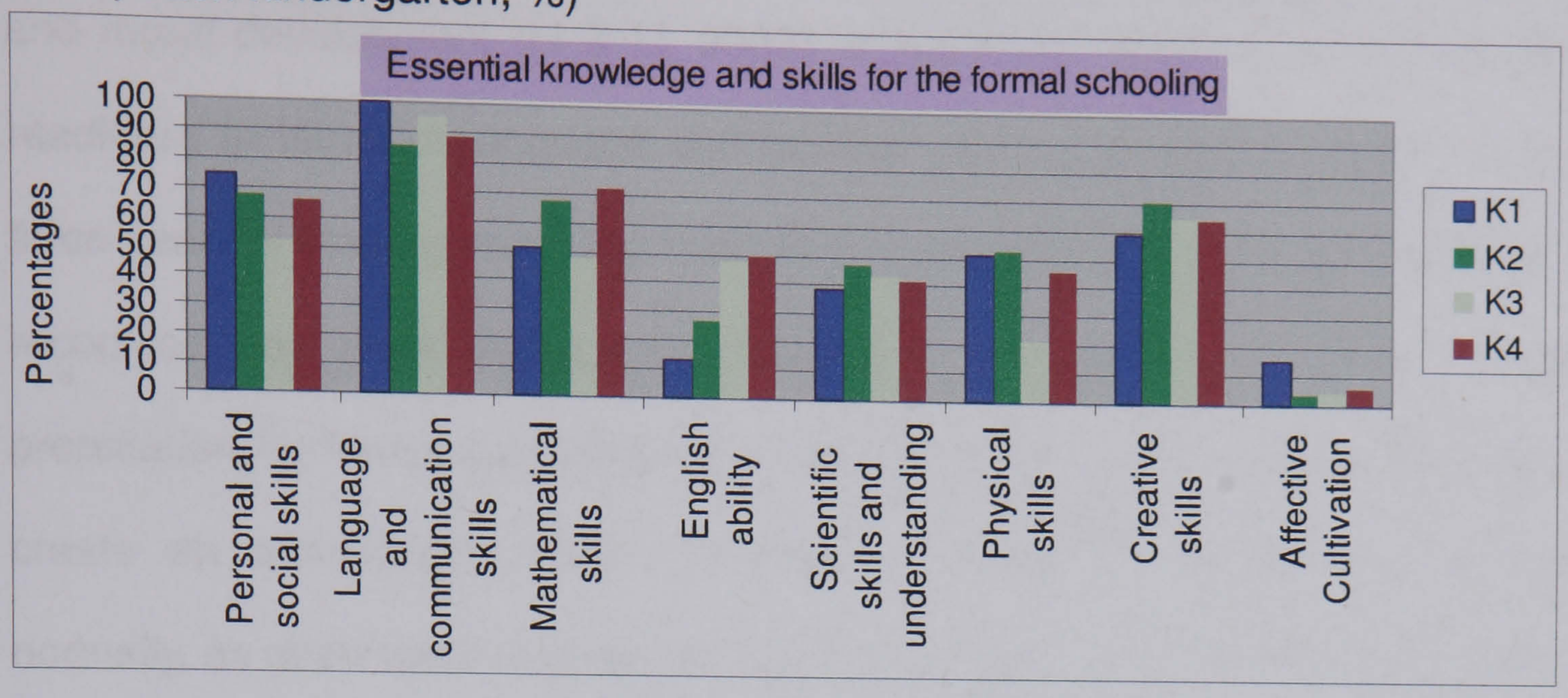
Similar statements were also made by teachers in other kindergartens. Common understanding of important knowledge and skills for children aged 3 to 6 emerged in the data from Q33 in the teachers' questionnaire (see Figure 4-6). Language and communication skills ranked first, as 85% of respondents regarded them as vital skills children must have for formal schooling, while, about 80% of respondents believed mathematical skills were essential. Despite the emphasis paid to it by the kindergartens, attention given to English ability was relatively low as only 29% of respondents believed it to be essential. For 79% of teachers, children's personal and social skills were another essential aspect of children's formal schooling. Surprisingly, only 52% of teachers chose scientific understanding of the world as essential.

Figure 4-6: Essential knowledge and skills gained from kindergarten (teachers' views, each kindergarten, %)



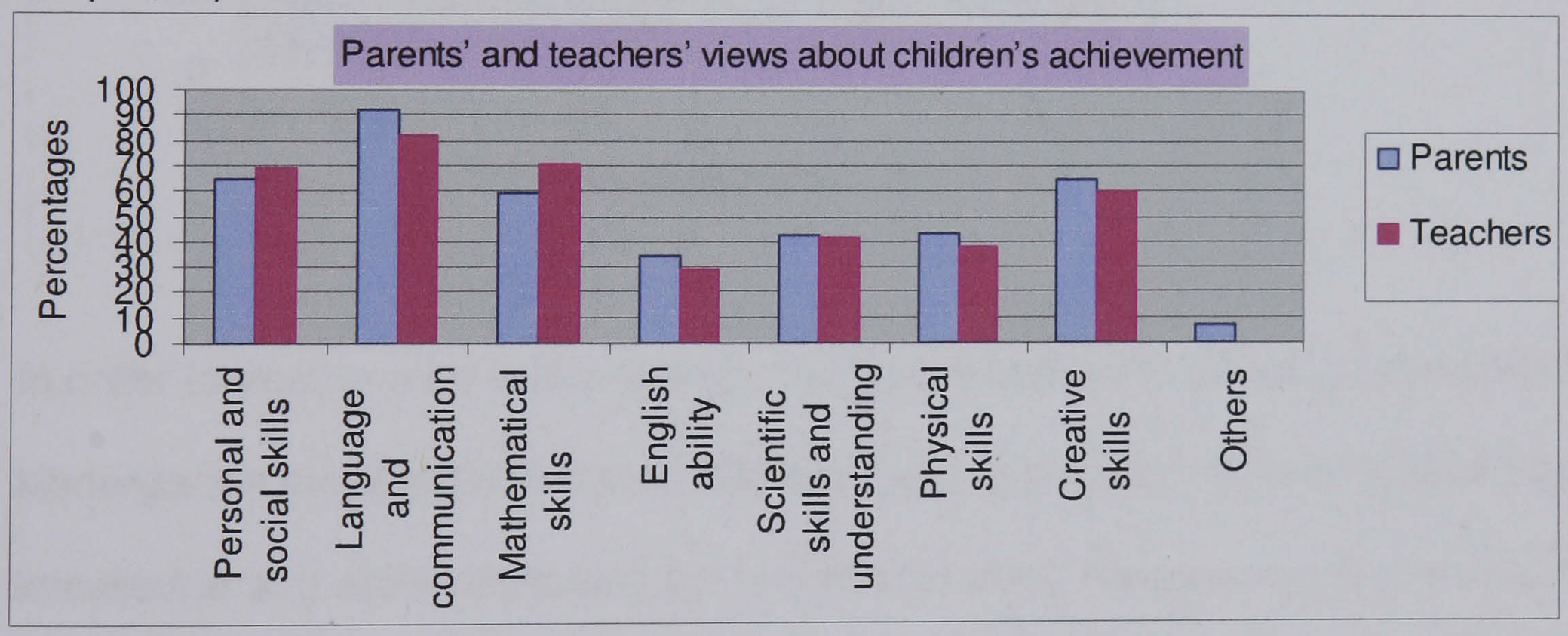
Similar responses were given by parents (see Figure 4-7). Over 90% of parents from these four kindergartens agreed with teachers that the development of language and communication skills were the most important aspect at the preschool stage. Unlike teachers, only 60% of parents believed that mathematical skills were vital for children to develop. For parents, personal and social skills were ranked after language and communicative skills as the second most important aspect for children. Moreover, besides personal and social skills, language and communicative skills, mathematic skills, English ability, scientific skills and understanding, physical skills, and creative skills, about 7% of parents reported on their questionnaires that children's social-emotional development was also vital in current 'one child per family' situation.

Figure 4-7: Essential knowledge and skills gained from kindergarten (parents' views, each kindergarten, %)



About 64% of parents, slightly higher than 60% of teachers, believed that children's creative skills should be cultivated at preschool stage. Chinese parents tended to have similar views to the kindergarten teachers in terms of children achievement (see Figure 4-8).

Figure 4-8: Parents' and teachers' views about children's achievement (whole sample, %)

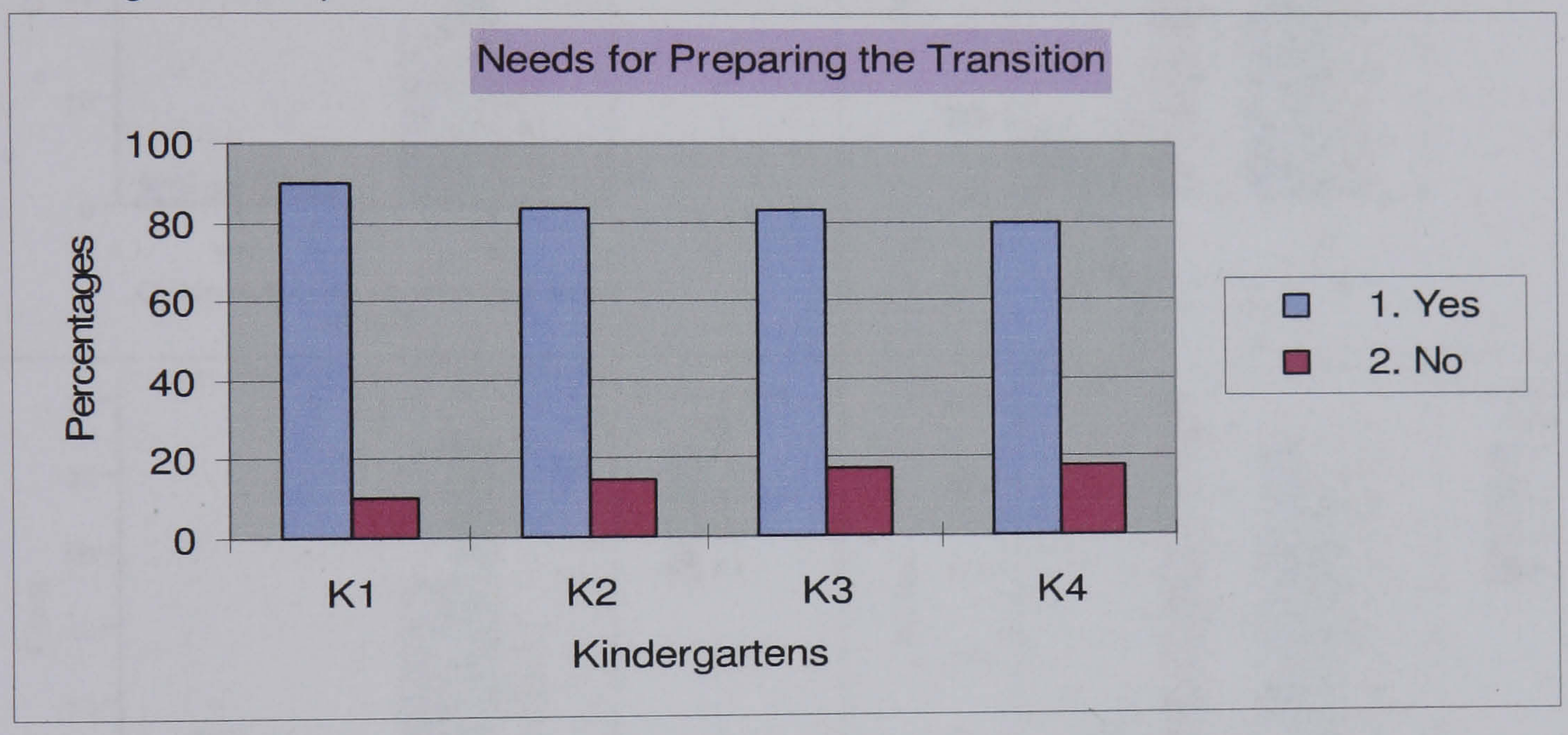


4.3c Preparation for formal schooling

A significant number of kindergarten teachers and parents believed that kindergarten has changed from being solely a care provider into a provider of both education and care. Through systematic training and carefully designed

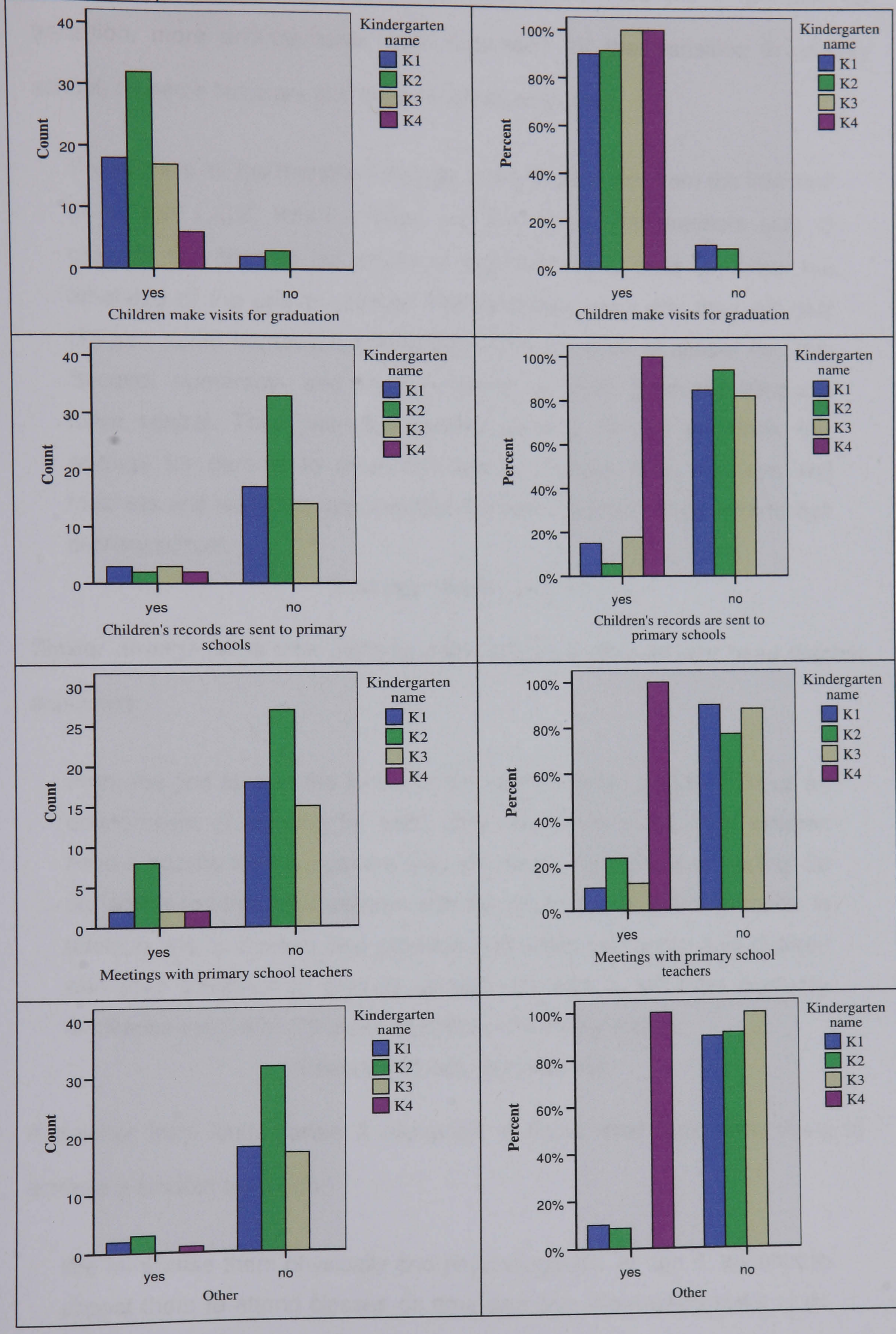
activities, children engage with personal, social, intellectual, physical, aesthetical, and moral development (Li & Li, 2003). In particular, children develop school readiness in terms of language and number skills and learning habits, during three years of kindergarten. The need to prepare children for formal schooling is recognised by most kindergarten teachers (see Figure 4-9). They regard preparation for formal schooling as an important task and work with parents to create an atmosphere which enhances children's preparation for school, normally, as observed in this research, in the last term of their kindergarten lives.

Figure 4-9: Preparing children for formal schooling (teachers' views, each kindergarten, %)



In order to ensure a smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school, each kindergarten prepared children in different ways to ensure that they obtained the knowledge and skills necessary for formal schooling. Arrangements were made for children to get to know their primary school if the kindergarten was attached to the primary school; children's records were sent to the primary schools (see Figure 4-10, statistic data obtained from Q23 in the teachers' questionnaire).

Figure 4-10: preparation for formal schooling (frequency & percentages, each kindergarten)



Apart from these brief arrangements that underpinned the preparation for transition, more arrangements were organised for the transition to primary school, as some teachers and head teachers explained:

> We prepare for the transition through three steps. First, from the first term of *da ban* (*大班, when children are 5-6 years old*), teachers start to prepare the children by gradually requiring each child to follow the timetable of the primary school. For example, every day they will give children some homework and expect them to arrive at school on time. Second, numeracy- and literacy-related teaching gradually becomes more central. Third, we also prepare parents for the transition. We arrange for parents to meet and talk to primary head teachers and teachers and we make opportunities for both children and parents to visit primary school.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

Similar arrangements took place in other kindergartens, as one head teacher explained:

> From the first term in the kindergarten, each teacher tries to build up an environment of learning for each child. We believe that once children have a healthy learning pattern they will carry it throughout schooling. So our aim is to familiarise children with this way of good learning habits. In addition, the curriculum also provides instruction on how to help children with their transition to primary schools. By age 5, teachers gradually familiarise them with the learning pattern of primary school.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

A teacher from kindergarten 2 explained in detail what they were doing to achieve a smooth transition:

> We familiarise them physically and psychologically. At age 5, we start to expect them to attend classes on time and give them small tasks to do

after school every day. In addition, we expect them to express their ideas through whole sentences, to think before talking in order to express the idea clearly. We describe primary school to them including what courses they will attend, what subjects they will learn, what they will do in school and after school. We familiarise them with the situation in the primary school so that they can have a picture in their minds.

(Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

Like their state counterparts, arrangements were made in the private kindergarten for the formal schooling in order to familiarise children:

> The preparation for transition at this stage is very very important to us and to parents as parents have high expectations of it. Therefore, we have 35 to 40 minutes for a session which is the same as in primary school. We ask parents to prepare a *shu bao* (*satchel,* 书包) for each child as they do in primary school. But the most important aspect to us is to prepare the children psychologically. We introduce children to the primary school, give them a basic introduction. In fact, I think the formation of learning, living, and moral and ethical habits are more important than simply preparing them for primary school. If they have good habits, wherever they are, they can do well.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

The kindergartens in this study prepared children for the transition to formal schooling. Parents emphasised the importance of preparation for transition. As a result, lessons were organised to mirror primary school classes to familiarise children with formal schooling. There is no formal assessment or evaluation of children's learning required by the kindergartens; children in China are not formally assessed until the first year of primary school.

Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter explain how ECEC policy is translated into practice at kindergarten level. A variety of practice carried out by teachers in daily teaching and learning activities, as well as arrangements in terms of curriculum implementation, parental involvement, and formal schooling transition were also included. As discussed previously, although early years education has been conducted for more than 100 years in China, it was not until the introduction of the new guidance (2001) that ECEC has been given more serious emphasis by both policy making and practice.

At policy-making level, emphasis has been placed on children's holistic – personal, social, emotional, intellectual, physical, moral, and aesthetical – development through five areas – health, language, science, society, and arts – of enhancement. In practice, efforts to achieve this holistic development are organised through institutional management, curriculum organisation, teachers' training, attitudes, and responsibility and teaching skills. Moreover, it was also found that more concern in practice has been given to children's learning and kindergarten lives, parental satisfaction and involvement, and preparation for formal schooling.

The discussion presented in this chapter is based on evidence collected from questionnaires and interviews and supplemented with observational data of kindergarten practice which sought to present the picture in four Chinese kindergartens. Barber (1995) argued that teachers determine the quality of education, and in this sense, teachers' perspectives and beliefs determine the practice of policy implementation. Consequently, it is necessary to listen to

teachers' perceptions and beliefs to understand the whole picture within the preschool setting. Therefore, in the next chapter, the examination of teachers' and parents' perspectives will be presented.

Chapter 5 Kindergarten Practices: Views of Head Teachers, Teachers, and Parents

Introduction

This chapter focuses on head teachers', teachers', and parents' perceptions, understanding, and beliefs about ECEC policy. These are enunciated through the implementation of kindergarten activities and curriculum approaches. Contrasting and critical views expressed by research participants will be discussed to identify issues emerging when putting policy into practice and organising and delivering curriculum activities. The extent to which parental views are affecting the implementation of the curriculum is also examined. In this chapter, practitioners' opinions will be presented, together with a brief rationale for the formation and upholding of such perceptions.

This first section deals with the perspectives of teachers. The presentation of how teachers perceive and understand ECEC aims to explore how their understanding affects own practice. This is followed by discussion of the relevance of ECEC, regarded as essential in terms of child education and school readiness by teachers. Then, challenges that teachers faced when planning the curriculum and its delivery, including strategies that they have employed, and support that they received to effectively teach are thus examined. The second section of this chapter focuses on parental perspectives of ECEC policy and mostly aspects of practice. Of special relevance is the impact of ECEC on child education, parental satisfaction with kindergartens provision and all activities for

children. A more detailed discussion of parental perspectives on children and childhood will be included. Furthermore, any further issues revealed by the data will be discussed. Finally, the last section of this chapter will provide a brief summary of conclusions that have emerged from the discussion.

5.1 Teachers' perceptions on policy implementation

In order to explore how practitioners perceive ECEC policy and practice, as well as how their perspectives and practice impact on children's development, it is necessary to examine how ECEC policy and practice were conceptualised by kindergarten teachers. Most kindergarten teachers saw the importance of ECEC in terms of overall development including personal, social, emotional, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and moral development of young children. According to the comments provided in Q34 in the teachers' questionnaire, most teachers said that observable changes have been made in early childhood education over the last decade. The changing perspective of ECEC has also impacted on teachers' perceptions and beliefs about working with young children. As some respondents expressed:

> I think great progress has been made in child education since 1990s. For example, child education is not merely a simple teaching and learning process but a series of activities based on child's experience and exploration of the world. The meaning of child education has been extended into a broader concept which encourages families and communities to participate.

> The most important change is that the evaluation of children's learning achievement has changed from chronological milestones only, to quantitative changes in progress which mean that the evaluation of achievement is not only based on their final attainment but also based on

the process that led to it.

(Questionnaire Notes, qT96-20-17, K3)

I think the original 'force-feeding' concept of education has changed to one which focuses attention on children's needs, emphasises the child-centred perspective, and prepares children for life-long learning.

(Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-27, K2)

Although great changes have been made in ECEC since the 1990s, it appeared that kindergarten teachers still feel under pressure in terms of meeting parental requirements, enhancing children's overall development, and ensuring children's well-being. Many kindergarten teachers expressed the view that being a kindergarten teacher is not a simple job with no pressure:

> ...children have become more and more precious and parents have paid more and more attention to children's achievement. Nowadays, children's education becomes a tough task for educators. Although more emphasis has been placed on children learning through play, we teachers still face the pressure to ensure children achieve at a high level. I feel even stronger about the demands from parents. I can understand, because for my own kid I have same requirement for her teachers. I visited kindergartens in European countries last year. I observed so many differences; I think we have a long way to go for the development of our early childhood education.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

It's not an easy job. You need to be patient, kind, and good at singing, dancing, acting, and drawing. Everything! You also need to know how to work under pressure which is very important. Tough ah!

(Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

To be honest, I don't feel it was a good decision to be a kindergarten teacher. In fact, sometimes I regretted having chosen it. Although early years education is important, only a few young children can remember

their kindergarten teachers. I think to be a kindergarten teacher is not easy because you spend more but gain less, sometimes children won't even remember you. I am not asking for any material reward from them but psychologically I want them to remember me. And we have lower salaries...

(Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

From these statements, it appears that in Chinese kindergarten settings the importance of ECEC is in line with national policy presented previously. Most of the kindergarten teachers in this study felt that there had been great changes since the 1990s. However, owing to the one child policy and increasing competition in recent years, the emphases on children's achievement and learning outcomes have become even higher since 1990s. This affects the practice of kindergarten teachers. A detailed discussion will be included in the later sections.

5.1a Implementation of ECEC in kindergarten sectors

Early intervention has considerable impact on children's brain development and school readiness (Young, 2000). Especially in such a dramatically changed society like China, early childhood education is regarded as one of the major factors to deal with potential effects, positive and negative, on young children's education. It is claimed that the changing perspective of society has also influenced perspectives on child and childhood. Although children today have more freedom in choices of living and education, higher expectations of future success have changed the dynamics of the childhood and child education. Thus, engagement in ECEC has become essential for a child to build a sound foundation for future development. Several teachers expressed similar views on

the importance of ECEC in Q34 in the teachers' questionnaire:

> During past 10 years early childhood education has changed a lot in terms of changing perspectives of teaching, children become the centre of teaching and learning, and the traditional 'force-feeding' approach has been abandoned... fundamentally I think it is because the views of children and childhood education have changed. There has been more focus on developing children as healthy human beings with abilities to cope with society and other members of society...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-20-14, K1)

> As the whole society has experienced dramatic changes since opening-up, many changes have been made in early childhood education as well; teachers' responsibility has changed from a teaching position to a leading position. Children become the centre.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-20-08, K3)

Changes in children's upbringing have also resulted in changes in the way ECEC is implemented today in kindergarten. On the one hand, the 'one child policy' has influenced family structure as well as parental attitudes towards the 'precious' little baby. The tendency to 'spoil' their children has made parents depend on ECEC to correct and re-socialise their children. On the other hand, as women have more and more opportunities to join the workforce, ECEC sectors have been regarded as a major 'problem solver' to balance work and child care for parents. However, the kindergarten itself has experienced difficulties in implementing care and education with high demands on safety and child-related issues from parents. As one respondent outlined:

> Sometimes, it is very difficult to conduct an activity because of the safety concerns we have to bear in mind. For example, one session is to allow children to make and cook dumplings. We do not do it because the fire is

too dangerous. We can't take the risk... parents pay so much attention to children's safety. We had a dispute with one parent just because of a small scratch on the boy's face. The parent wanted the teacher to apologise in front of the whole kindergarten. Even though incidents such as this cannot be avoided, because it happened in the kindergarten, we took responsibility for it.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

The pressure caused by the one child policy is believed to be a possible reason why both parents and kindergartens are extremely cautious about children's well-being. Despite the fact that kindergartens are expected to re-socialise potentially 'spoiled' children, parents still want their children to be treated the same as they are at home. Thus, the contradictions within parental attitudes towards ECEC have affected the practice of kindergarten teachers.

Moreover, the heavy pressure on learning outcomes has also impacted on the practice of kindergarten teachers. Because of this, teachers have to devote most of their activities to dealing with teaching and learning. While teachers generally recognise the changes in ECEC perspectives which tend to free children from the traditional 'force-feeding' model and have substituted a child-centred and activity-based learning experience, many respondents admitted that their ultimate goals were to enable children to achieve, which make it difficult to abandon the traditional teaching and learning model. The discussion on the difficulties that Chinese kindergarten teachers are currently facing will be continued in the following section. A detailed analysis of differences between policy and implemented policy will be presented on the basis of what is happening currently in kindergarten.

5.1b Policy and practice in reality

From the previous discussion, the implementation of ECEC in kindergarten sectors is deeply influenced by radical changes in Chinese society where family dynamics in terms of family structure and women's status have changed. Additionally, the focus on children's well-being and learning outcomes has also impacted on the practice of kindergarten teachers. Throughout the fieldwork, it was widely acknowledged by respondents that the burden of attainment and issues of health and safety have become greater, despite perceived changes towards children, childhood, and child education. As commented in Q34 in the teachers' questionnaire, there are higher expectations for children's personal, social, emotional, physical, aesthetic, and moral development:

> During past 10 years, early childhood education has developed into a more complex concept which is required to provide children with fundamental capacities and qualities for lifelong learning and foundations. As a result, teachers need to provide activities to assist children with holistic development.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-28, K2)

Although changes are acknowledged in terms of children's holistic development, it seems that the burden of kindergarten teachers becomes even heavier because they are not only expected to enhance children's academic achievement but also to develop their qualities including social, emotional, and moral development:

> You know kindergarten teachers are working under pressure to achieve children's all-round development, nowadays, we have higher pressure from the curriculum concept and from parents. But we earn less salary than in many other jobs. Our job always has low priority compared with

other phases of education.

(Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

As a result, inconsistencies were observed between what was laid down in policy documents and what practitioners were actually doing. The five-area enhancement promoted in the policy documents and curriculum should provide children with all-round achievement. However, some parents want their child's development to be assessed through directly observed targets, for example, how many Chinese characters the child can recognise or up to what number the child can count. Consequently, many kindergarten teachers stated that these facts have impacted on their daily practice accordingly to satisfy the parents.

The curriculum is the main resource to guide the teachers' daily practice. However, activities designed to enhance academic achievement were also conducted to meet parents' requirements. Most teachers admitted that to teach academic-related subjects was not regarded as good practice, according to the Guidance; however, in reality they had to do it because of the pressure from parents.

> The curriculum we are currently using has a new model for children's overall development which enhances children's ability through five areas. However, most parents think that the benefit of this curriculum to children is small, because children are not taught to write nor count. So we have to add writing and numerical activities for our four, five, and six year old children, which are not encouraged in this curriculum. Actually, these are not what we would like to do but we have no choice because parents want to see these kinds of achievements and this will directly affect the enrolment of children for next year.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

She continued her talk about how these tensions affected the organisation of daily teaching and learning activities:

> The curriculum arrangement in our kindergarten is fairly structured to take account of parents' requirements and the teaching tasks. For example, we have very few outdoor activities because if we spent too much time on outdoor activities, we would not be able to finish the teaching tasks although in the curriculum the importance of outdoor activities is addressed. Sometimes, outdoor activities serve the purpose of achieving teaching tasks. Children in our kindergarten have fewer chances for self-initiated activities...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Most respondents described the tension between what they felt they should do and what they had to do in similar terms. Difficulties encountered when implementing the curriculum were mentioned by many respondents in both questionnaires and interviews. Among all the comments made, a lack of sufficient training, a lack of teaching resources, and safety issues were pointed out:

> When our kindergarten first used this curriculum, teachers had very vague ideas about what they should do. Without sufficient training, some of the teachers had difficulties in understanding the curriculum theme. Some even thought the five-area development should be achieved in one single class. The lesson became difficult to follow as they put too much information in it...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Regardless of the administrative status of the kindergartens, head teachers and teachers in both public and private kindergarten were facing difficulties in fully implementing the curriculum in daily practice. As one public kindergarten head

teacher stated:

> The curriculum includes different themes which helps children to interpret the world around them. For example, there is a session about a harvest. In this session, children should have the opportunity to work in a field and to experience the procedure of collecting a crop from the fields. We can't do this session as we can't provide the necessary experiences for both our teachers and children.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-01, K1)

Besides issues of teacher training and teaching resources, children's health and safety were also given much attention by the kindergarten teachers:

> We have rules in terms of children's safety for all our teachers including ensuring the safety of all children, taking care of children all the time, counting children to make sure all the children stay in the group with the other children. These three are basic requirements for each teacher; we have other rules which I won't go into now.
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-02, K2)

Although many respondents were aware that what they should do was different from what they actually did, the situation in many Chinese kindergartens, as observed, remained unchanged. A significant number of teachers indicated that although the policy advocated the implementation of the new curriculum, what happened in practice was different, due to the physical and social environments of the kindergartens. Consequently, it is very likely that kindergartens and teachers with different perspectives will have difficulty in implementing the policy and curriculum. In the next section, a detailed discussion regarding these issues will be presented.

51c Difficulties of teachers when implementing policy

In this study, ECEC is believed to have a significant impact on children's all-round development and school preparedness. Most teachers in this study expressed the view that even though great importance has been given to ECEC, yet, compared with other phases of education; it still received low priority in practice. Generally, kindergarten teachers received less support from both provincial and national government. Kindergartens themselves were the main provider of training for their teachers. However, not every kindergarten could provide sufficient in-service training, and the situation for the private kindergarten was particularly acute. Some kindergarten teachers in this study reported that they have had difficulties doing their jobs owing to the reasons that follow.

Pressure of academic achievement and preparation for school

Many teachers in this research pointed out that the pressure from the expectation that at the end of their kindergarten education children would be high achievers and be well prepared for formal schooling was the major factor affecting the implementation of the curriculum and the practice of kindergarten teachers. As discussed earlier, the introduction of the new kindergarten Guidance in 2001 has resulted in great changes in the perspectives on child development. The idea that children should achieve not only academically but also their overall well-being was promoted in new Guidance. This increased the pressure on teachers and children to achieve the new goals. Reluctantly, kindergarten teachers are now facing the dilemma, on the one hand, to fulfil the 'all-round developmental' goal promoted by the guidance; and on the other hand,

to keep the traditional 'force-feeding' model of teaching in order to satisfy parents by providing visible learning outcomes which are not immediately obvious in the new curriculum.

This situation has made it difficult for teachers to implement the policy in their practice. Some teachers stated that sometimes there were certain things they were reluctant to do, for example, to teach children Chinese characters or counting, but they had no choice as these were areas that the parents wanted to be covered. In other words, it seemed the newly developed perspectives on ECEC did not automatically impact on teachers' practice by changing the traditional teaching model into a more child-centred and play-based model. It appeared that kindergarten teachers face more pressure nowadays, as one kindergarten teacher stated:

> I would like those 'experts' to stop making more and more 'traps' for us. For the past few years, we have been completely preoccupied with following their suggestions. It seems we are still trapped and don't know what to do. We have limited energy and can't spend it all finding a balance between their requirements and parental expectations.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-20-15, K3)

Furthermore, such increasing pressure on teachers has also forced them to pay more attention to subject teaching which is believed to be much easier for parents to observe. Consequently, some kindergarten teachers admitted that although subject teaching is not required in the new curriculum, they have had to do it anyway because it can easily be assessed by parents.

> It is 9.20 in the morning; all children have returned from morning exercises and settled down in front of their little tables. They are waiting

for the teachers to start the day's sessions. One of the teachers (the older one) is playing the tape recorder, while the younger teacher is distributing Chinese textbooks to each child. The older teacher asks all the children to listen to the tape and to read after it while the younger teacher is walking around the classroom to help each child to concentrate... after 10 minutes of listening to the radio, the younger teacher stops the radio while the older teacher is writing Chinese characters on the blackboard... she starts to teach the children the characters. She invites some children to read out the characters. She then asks the whole class to read out the characters together... the Chinese character learning ends after children have learned all the characters.

(Observation notes, oT12-02-1, K1)

By and large, kindergartens and teachers are influenced by the newly developed curriculum in terms of practice and perceptions. Their practice was affected because, discarding their traditional models, kindergarten teachers now had to integrate new activities to achieve children's all-round development as healthy human beings. However, parental expectations of children's achievement also affected their practice.

Parental influences

Parental expectations and satisfaction appeared to be another factor that affects teachers' practice and implementation of policy. As previously discussed, Chinese children are currently facing high expectations from parents with regard to academic excellence and there is heavy competition among peers. Most parents said that they want their children to be well prepared for future schooling. Here, being well prepared means academic achievement. Although most Chinese parents understand the importance of all-round development of young children, because of the academic competition a child will face in the future,

parents put more emphasis on the academic results because of the direct impact on a child's future.

> When I talk to parents, sometimes I feel that they have very complex attitudes towards their child's learning and happiness. One parent told me not long ago, she wants her son to be happy and not to have too much pressure, but she can't because other parents are encouraging their children in different academic studies. Her son would not be able to compete with these children, if she does nothing. So she won't let it happen.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

It was clear that parental preference for academic achievement has become a crucial indicator for kindergartens because it impacts on the enrolment and funding of each kindergarten. As a result, some kindergarten heads admitted that they follow parental demands when constructing their prospectus. As one kindergarten head explained:

> The enrolment for this year was increased compared with last year. We had 60 more children enrolled which is unusual as more and more kindergartens have been set up so that there is more choice now. The reason why we had increased enrolment, I think, is because firstly the graduates from our kindergarten are doing well in primary school in terms of study and other aspects like performing, drawing and good general abilities. Secondly, it is because of our kindergarten-parents relationship. We do our best to please parents, although there are some parents that choose to leave, but on the whole, they stay because they feel positive about the kindergarten...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

This perception has driven teachers to devote time and effort to the pursuit of academic achievement in order to meet both parents' expectations. A teacher

stated:

> Although we had a lot of changes in the way we teach children, to some extent we have to keep some of our traditions because some parents would like to see that we are doing these. They expect us to teach Chinese characters or numeracy... they know they are not right to require too much at this stage, but I am sure they will not be too happy if their children don't make any progress...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-30, K2)

Policy influences

In the previous chapter (Chapter 4), the discussion of national perspectives towards respecting children's rights and improving ECEC quality was clearly incorporated in the policy of holistic child education proposed by the central government. However, some kindergarten teachers reported that the policy they are currently implementing is problematic and caused difficulties.

It was pointed out by some respondents that there were very few policy documents available for kindergarten education. Moreover, the documents available failed to provide either clear guidance or practical suggestions for teachers' practice. A huge gap between the policy-making and the action taken was observed. A lack of direct communication between the policy makers and kindergarten teachers exists in Chinese society. However, despite the existence of this gap, nothing has been done to solve this problem, by either the central government or by the individual kindergartens. Thus, difficulties occur when teachers try to implement the policy in their daily practice.

Some respondents expressed concerns about their lack of appropriate guidance and insufficient training. Although some kindergartens provided training

programmes, these mostly focused on theoretical issues, while guidance on implementation and practice including what to teach (contents) and how to teach (methods) were regarded by teachers as much more important.

Although some kindergarten heads expressed pride in preparing teachers through various training programmes, some teachers expressed their views by commenting that these courses were 'impractical, too theoretical, and sometimes aimless'. But the organisers of these programmes believed them to be helpful for teachers' knowledge on early childhood education, understanding of policy, and so on. Some kindergarten teachers stated that if the training programme focused too much on theoretical perspectives, it would provide limited help for their practice. More practical training was needed to support the development of their teaching methods, understanding and implementing the curriculum.

> ...Although we attended sessions conducted by professors from our university, these sessions did not give us much help in improving our teaching abilities. I found these professors had very little experience of working in the kindergarten, the suggestions they provided were not practical.
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-01, K1)

Similar sentiments were expressed by other teachers with regard to inappropriate training experiences. Some teachers had attended distance education training courses, not because they wanted to do better in their jobs, but because they would like to change either through promotion or through career change. In general, neither training programmes nor policy guidance have provided concrete advice to kindergarten teachers to balance the policy

requirements and what they have to do in practice. Thus, most kindergarten teachers encountered huge difficulties when implementing the policy in their practice. Some kindergarten teachers said that more support, understanding, and positive feedback in relation to their jobs were needed.

5.1d Need for support

In this research it became apparent that these kindergarten teachers were facing a great deal of pressure in trying to reinforce children's learning outcomes and meet parental expectations as well as fully implementing the national policy. They were struggling to cope with all these difficulties while trying to ensure that they were doing their jobs appropriately. Most respondents agreed that they needed more understanding from parents which might have made their jobs easier. And most respondents agreed that most parents do understand that the all-round development of young children was important and appreciated what teachers were trying to achieve. These parents' encouragement gave vital support to the teachers. Some respondents said that parental understanding and support was essential for them to carry out their daily practice. As a kindergarten teacher put it:

> It is essential to have good relationships with parents. I won't expect too much with regard to their help or support, I just don't want them to make my job harder…
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-02, K2)

Although it seemed to be necessary to take parental suggestions or demands into account when planning activities, most teachers expressed that they would not be able to put such suggestions into action if they were superfluous.

> We do what we can for parents, to be honest. Although their involvement and understanding is vital, sometimes I feel it is better to carry out my own ideas and my own ways of teaching.
>
> I do respect their ideas and requirements, but I won't take them on if I think it is unnecessary. They are welcome to give suggestions but it doesn't mean they will influence my teaching...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-01, K1)

Other respondents expressed the view that they expected parents to have the same ideas as they did, because it would make a big difference to their jobs and to children's achievement:

> We want to build up a unified situation towards children's education so that children will not be treated differently when they are at home and in the kindergarten. Because they only spend a few hours in the kindergarten, what they do at home directly influences children's behaviour...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Most kindergarten teachers in this research believed it was important to have positive feedback from parents. A better understanding of what they were doing would help their practice and reduce the burden of parental complaints or disagreements.

Furthermore, most kindergarten teachers agreed that supportive head teachers and effective leadership could play an important role in clarifying their jobs. In all the kindergartens visited, the head teachers seemed to be friendly and supportive to all the teachers. Their managerial style appeared quite flexible and democratic, which allowed the teachers' voice to be heard. As one head teacher described:

> We try to support our teachers as much as we can, especially when there are disputes between teachers and parents. In front of parents we stick up for our teachers. We then talk individually to teachers...
>
> (Interview Notes, iHT3-03, K4)

Most kindergarten head teachers built up good relationships with teachers by allowing them greater freedom in their jobs. Although head teachers emphasised the importance of parental satisfaction, policy implementation, and funding and enrolment, they tended to minimise the influence of these issues on their teachers. Most head teachers tried to provide a clear managerial style which encouraged their staff to share different opinions and views whenever necessary.

On the whole, parental understanding and head teachers' support could make a big difference to teachers' job satisfaction. However, some teachers stated that they need different kind of support to improve their situation. Hence, the following section presents a discussion of teachers' requirements.

5.1e Need for improvement

As previously discussed, a significant amount of training provided either officially or unofficially, has been available for kindergarten teachers, yet some teachers in this study stated that some of the training programmes available were either too theoretical or impractical and did not help them to improve their teaching abilities or professional knowledge. The lack of sufficient appropriate training programmes was regarded as one of the difficulties which has affected teachers' implementation of the new curriculum. Many respondents expressed the need for more practically- orientated training programmes.

> ...our kindergarten has made great contributions to improving teachers quality... I think they are good, but I would prefer more practical activities as I would like to know what to do, instead of knowing only what.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-20-07, K3)

Although many kindergarten teachers commented in Q34 in the teachers' questionnaire that great progress has been made recently in terms of professional commitment, teaching efficacy, and teaching strategies, they still pointed out that they could do better if more relevant training and opportunities could be offered to them.

> ... I prefer more information so that I can have better perspectives and better preparation for my classes...
>
> (Interview Notes, iT3-03, K4)

Chinese early childhood education has recently changed dramatically in terms of perspectives. Yet, kindergarten teachers said that they were unready, lacked confidence and felt insecure in terms of trying to deal with these changes. A big gap was observed between the policy intentions and the practitioners' reaction. According to the notes on Q34 in the teachers' questionnaire, most teachers in this study expressed an urgent need to enhance their professional abilities to cope with such rapid changes within early childhood education.

However, the excessive workloads most kindergarten teachers currently face have added to their difficulties at work. As observed in this study, kindergarten teachers had to spend considerable time and effort in coping with large classes. In these circumstances, most kindergarten teachers stated that caring for and educating each individual child is sometimes very difficult as they are not able to give careful attention to each child. As a result, many kindergarten teachers

called for cutting down their workloads which would allow them to work more effectively and more carefully.

The most important issue raised by some kindergarten teachers was the issue of communication between kindergarten teachers, parents, head teachers, and education authorities. The common communication pattern used in the Chinese education system was the 'top-down' model, through which policy and decisions made at the upper level were passed down to the lower level and then to each individual sector.

Although kindergartens visited in this research adopted a flexible and democratic managerial style which enabled teachers' and parents' concerns to be heard, kindergartens had a problem of being ignored. In other words, teachers and parents could communicate with head teachers; however, head teachers had little communication with the upper levels. The early years sector was characterised by a lack of upwards communication which resulted in a gap between the policy and what happens in reality. According to one kindergarten teacher, the failure of communication between the upper level and the individual practitioner could raise more problems. Some kindergarten teachers felt it would be helpful to build up an efficient communication channel through which voices can be heard, decisions can be modified through communication, and gaps can be bridged.

Besides the issue of communication, some kindergarten teachers expressed the need to 'liberate' kindergarten children from the pressure of academic success and being competitive for future schooling. Some teachers were critical of the heavy pressure and high expectations of children at this early stage.

> I think it is necessary to familiarise children with learning at this stage but it should not be too complicated. Children should have a happy and memorable childhood which should be pressure-free and with time for free play. But nowadays, children can't have a simple childhood...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qT96-36-13, K2)

The reason why a simple childhood was impossible was related to the evaluation and assessment model in the education system in China. In the Chinese education system, the test-orientated system dominates and only academic achievement is appreciated by teachers, parents, and even students themselves. Early childhood education, therefore, is affected in terms of preparing children for their future achievements. Children, at this stage, cannot simply have a playful childhood; instead, certain academic achievements are expected.

In this respect, some kindergarten teachers stated that the whole evaluation system seemed problematic and restricted children to a narrow developmental plan – learning in order to pass tests. Even though in the kindergarten period, the requirement for academic achievement was not as demanding as in later stages, kindergarten teachers still felt it was important to reduce the academic burden on children and to allow them to have a happier childhood.

5.1f Summary

To sum up, kindergarten teachers in this study generally understood the importance of ECEC for enhancing children's overall development as well as for school preparation. ECEC is also regarded as a common solution to deal with the problems, for example of spoiling children raised by the 'one child policy' and other profound social, economic, and political changes in Chinese society. Kindergarten teachers, thus, are not only expected to enhance the academic

achievement of children but are also expected to develop children into healthy human beings with long term secure foundations.

However in reality, kindergarten teachers have difficulty in the implementation of such a policy because the policy itself is problematic and inconsistent in terms of decision making and implementing, policy direction and parental expectations, and so on. Moreover, the one-way, top-down model of communication within the education system seems to be the root of many problems. The voices of practitioners cannot be heard by the upper echelons of policy makers; thus, the needs of individual practitioners cannot be met. As a result, children suffer as well, because a simple playful childhood cannot be experienced in this education system.

Although some kindergarten teachers thought that there had been some improvement in the early years sectors, few practical changes have been achieved because the fundamental features of the Chinese education system have not changed. The dominant perspective remains one of an examination-oriented culture in which high marks for academic achievements are prized. Therefore, it is argued that more fundamental changes, particularly in general perspectives towards education and achievement will have to be made in the Chinese education system.

In the following section, parents' perspectives towards ECEC and their views on children's achievement will be discussed. In so doing, a complete picture of the two perspectives from teachers and parents can be drawn. By making this comparison, issues and insights can be pulled out for further discussion.

5.2 Parents' perspectives on policy implementation

In the previous section, teachers' perspectives and understandings towards ECEC were presented. As previously discussed, ECEC is understood by most kindergarten teachers as an essential element to enhance children's all-round development for future schooling. In order to present a comprehensive picture of the situation, it is necessary to consider parental perceptions and beliefs about ECEC. It is argued here that both parental perspectives and teachers' beliefs help to shape current ECEC as observed in China.

Thus, in this section, parental perspectives and understandings of ECEC will be presented from a broader viewpoint which investigates general parental perspectives on the kindergarten, the teachers, and the curriculum. It further discusses a more specific perspective on children's early learning and early achievement. A comparison between kindergarten teachers and kindergarten parents will be conducted. In so doing, their perspectives on the same aspects can be obtained and insights into whether there is a gap between the perceptions of teachers and parents will be presented. Additionally, a further discussion on whether the current ECEC policy can satisfy both parents' and children's needs will also be conducted in the following section.

5.2a General perspectives of parents

In order to obtain the views of kindergarten parents, a questionnaire survey was conducted in the four kindergartens selected for this research. Questionnaires given to kindergarten parents consisted of two parts 1) information about their involvement in children's early learning; 2) their understanding, beliefs and

perspectives towards ECEC. Questionnaires were sent to parents of 10% of the total population of children (n=262), which included 63 from K1, 76 from K2, 75 from K3, and 48 from K4. Altogether, 167 copies from parents were returned. The total return rate for parents was 64%.

As shown in Table 5-1, overall parents participating in this research had an above average level of education (secondary to tertiary education). Regardless of this characteristic of the sample, choices of kindergarten appear to be based on other aspects, as discussed previously rather than a choice made informed by their educational background.

Table 5-1: Parents' educational qualification (frequency & percentage)

	Mothers		Fathers	
	N	%	N	%
Primary or secondary	14	8	6	4
Further education	25	15	20	12
Certificate	50	30	47	28
Diploma	56	34	63	37
University degree	17	10	28	17
Other	3	2	3	2
Missing	2	1	0	0
Total	167	100	167	100

Chinese parents have strong beliefs that the success of their children largely depends on getting the best education available. Such traditional perspectives on education for future success are still current in Chinese society despite changes since the economic reform. This view of education and success was manifested by some parents in this study:

> I believe that children's achievement will be largely influenced by the education programmes provided for them. Nowadays, kindergartens focus more on cultivating children's habits and interests.

> Education at home focuses mainly on building up children's knowledge.

Both education models will work together for the child's future success ...

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-29, K2)

However, the cultural, social and political changes that China has experienced have impacted on parental concerns about education. As one parent explained:

> As a parent, I pay special attention to early years education. I think learning how to live as a member of a family, of a school, and of a society are all having influences on children. Therefore, parents sometimes unconsciously put emphasis on children's achievement because of the importance, as they perceive it, of being successful and capable in such a competitive society.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-09, K1)

> When I look at the competitive culture of industries, products, and even for human resources, I am very concerned about how cruel the future competition will be for my child. What I can do is to help him to learn better, to know how to use his knowledge, to have a special skill, to have the ability to communicate. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for him to be successful...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-03, K4)

Taking into consideration the changing context of society and its effects on the family and education, some kindergarten parents felt that child care and upbringing have become a complex task. Some parents admitted their confusion on how to appropriately educate their children. A parent stated her frustrations:

> On the one hand, I pay much attention to early years education but on the other hand I feel confused about it. I don't know how to educate my daughter. For example, the traditional point of view says that subjects (Chinese and mathematics) are important, but the new perspective says children should enjoy their childhood. Bringing in Chinese and numbers early will stifle children's creativity and imagination.

> The traditional perspective always controls children and makes them behave according to adults' views while the modern education says that children should have enough freedom to develop their own characters. However, these children, from a traditional point of view, are naughty and disobedient. All these differences make me feel so uncomfortable that sometimes I feel quite lost and don't know what to do...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-23-12, K2)

Besides the general impact brought by the cultural, social, and political changes in China, the one child policy, in particular, has made a great difference to family structures and perspectives towards children and childhood. The one child policy has meant that the average family size has declined. The child, thus, is considered as 'the family treasure' who receives full attention from both parents and grandparents (Fong, 2004). Chinese parents try to provide the best resources for their precious children. Therefore, such children are now experiencing a new type of childhood, mostly with Western influence. This can be observed in the adoption of fashionable clothing, fast food, modern music, and internet communication. Some parents also admitted that new trends brought about by economic reform also impacted on child care methods and education:

> Children are treated as individuals with personal feelings and perspectives. Children, parents, and teachers have equal rights. Children's upbringing can be directed by both parents and teachers while they construct personal knowledge and skills.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-23-08, K2)

> In the family, I will never force my daughter to learn 'this' or 'that'. I always encourage her to decide what she wants to learn and encourage her to take challenges by convincing her that nothing is impossible if you make an effort. We give her the best that we can but we won't use her as the

tool to realise our dreams...

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-42, K4)

However, some parents in this research said that their precious little children inevitably became 'spoiled'. Nevertheless, despite the new perspectives on childhood, the parents admitted that the upbringing of their children was still guided by traditional expectations of children's learning success and achievement. A plausible explanation for this is that Chinese people value education as a way of personal perfection, upward social mobility, and future success. Education is now seen as the 'ladder' to the future success (Lau, 1996).

> Children start to attend various activity clubs at a younger age. The expectations of children are become higher and higher. This has resulted in severe competition within the society. Children have to be strong to win the competition and to be excellent. Because they are the only child, they receive more attention from other family members...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-26, K2)

Some parents said that they would make sustained efforts to provide their children with the best education. Likewise, they expected their children to spend much of their time on studying both academic and non-academic subjects, to gain a career advantage, to keep up with the competitive standards required, and to reinforce their future prospects. Consequently, these parents explained that from a very young age, Chinese children may face intensive pressure from parents and peers. They are controlled and nurtured under the watchful eyes of their parents (Corsaro, 1997).

> The importance of early years education has been widely perceived by most parents. So we are providing as best as we can for our children.

> Sometimes, we even give them more than they want, for example, making many arrangements for learning a musical instrument, drawing... sometimes, I don't really want to do that, but I have to because I don't want my children to get behind other children and then in the end lose out in the future competition...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-44, K4)

It was apparent that full attention from parents, grandparents and the whole family has been directed to the 'precious little child' in order to cultivate him/her for future success. Some parents admitted that from a very young age, they tried to form the habit of hard work in their children. As explained by a parent, hard work, concentration, and making an effort were highly appreciated by most Chinese because they were seen as linked to success. Consequently, kindergartens were expected to inculcate these traits in children in order to enable them to achieve highly in the future.

Generally, it appeared that the new generation of Chinese children receive the full attention of their parents not only in terms of living and caring but also in their education. In order to enhance the competitive capacities of their children, parents involved them in various learning opportunities. However, in addition to being the centre of parental attention, love and pride, only children were expected to be the main source of their post-retirement income, medical payments and nursing care (Fong, 2004). Because of current inequalities among the modern economy, only an elite job can supply enough income to enable one person to fulfil all the obligations of support for children, parents, and parents-in-law. Thus, academic achievement has become the only way to win elite jobs. Hence, parental investment, attention, and constant monitoring of children's aspirations have consistently been supplied to provide every possible

advantage in the race to become elite.

Early years education, therefore, is understood as being essential to offer children a good start and to build a foundation for the future. Additionally, kindergarten is regarded as the first step of training to develop children's potential abilities to compete for an elite status in the educational system and the job market, as well as fulfilling parents' wishes for their only children to be 'a dragon'. As a result, more and more emphasis has been placed on child education. In the following section, parental perspectives and involvement in children's learning will be presented in terms of the choice of kindergarten, their perceptions of teachers, facilities, curriculum, kindergarten information, their involvement in children's learning and the preparation for formal schooling. Thus, a more holistic picture related to parents' perceptions towards their kindergarten can be obtained.

5.2b Parents' perceptions towards their kindergarten

On the basis of general insights of parental perspectives towards ECEC and child learning in Chinese society, involvement in ECEC programmes is believed to greatly influence children's overall development and academic preparedness. As a result, on the basis of previous discussion, more specific perceptions of parents towards daily teaching and learning programmes were investigated in order to underpin the implication drawn out in this research. In the following discussion, the researcher will firstly look at parents' perception of kindergarten curriculum and information. Their views on parental involvement, children's achievement, self-initiated activities, and the preparation for formal schooling will be also looked at.

How did parents choose the kindergarten?

Through informal and formal interviews and questionnaires (mainly from Q10 and Q11 in the parents' questionnaire), it appeared that parents generally were satisfied with the kindergarten they had chosen for their children. However, surprisingly good teaching quality was not the only criterion that influenced parental choices. The choice of the kindergarten was also influenced by distance from home, recommendation from other parents, relatives working in the kindergarten, and so on. As some parents said:

> The reason for choosing this kindergarten was because we live near to it which makes our life easy. We don't need to rush to the kindergarten every morning and afternoon which saves a lot of time. This kindergarten is also the best compared with other kindergartens in our area. Because it is a private kindergarten, sometimes they do better than some state kindergartens. My wife and I made several visits before we made the decision. They were nice to us, answered our questions patiently and provided a one-week trial for my son.
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-03, K4)

> The reason why we chose this kindergarten is because my husband's aunt is working there as a head teacher. She can take very good care of my daughter. My nephew, who is 3 years older than my daughter, also attended the same kindergarten. We had no doubt about choosing the same one.
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-02, K2)

In general, most parents expressed their ideas of a good kindergarten focusing mainly on children's happiness, teachers' attitudes, and safety-related issues. However, some parents had different opinions as one of the parents explained:

> I didn't consider other kindergartens because staffs at this university

> always send their children to this kindergarten. We don't need to pay and the kindergarten has a good reputation for its quality teaching and learning activities. My children know most kids in this kindergarten; they even know some of teachers. Because they are younger than most children, I think it is good for them to stay in an environment they are familiar with.

She then continued:

> I can trust this kindergarten because most children in it are from same background which it is important for me because I think family background affects children in terms of behaviour and ways of thinking. I think a similar family background can provide more security for a child's development... I know most teachers; I can easily talk to them. That's an advantage I wouldn't have in other kindergartens...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-01, K1)

In addition, most parents did not regard the kindergarten's facilities and environment as an important factor that would influence their choice. Even though some parents admitted that the kindergarten environment was comfortable and well organised for their children and their children had a wide range of activities available, such as a well-equipped playground, well-decorated classroom, they did not put as much weight on this aspect as kindergarten teachers did, in terms of creating a friendly environment for children. For most parents in this study, aspects such as kindergarten's reputation, teachers' attitudes, and children's safety and health issues were more important for them.

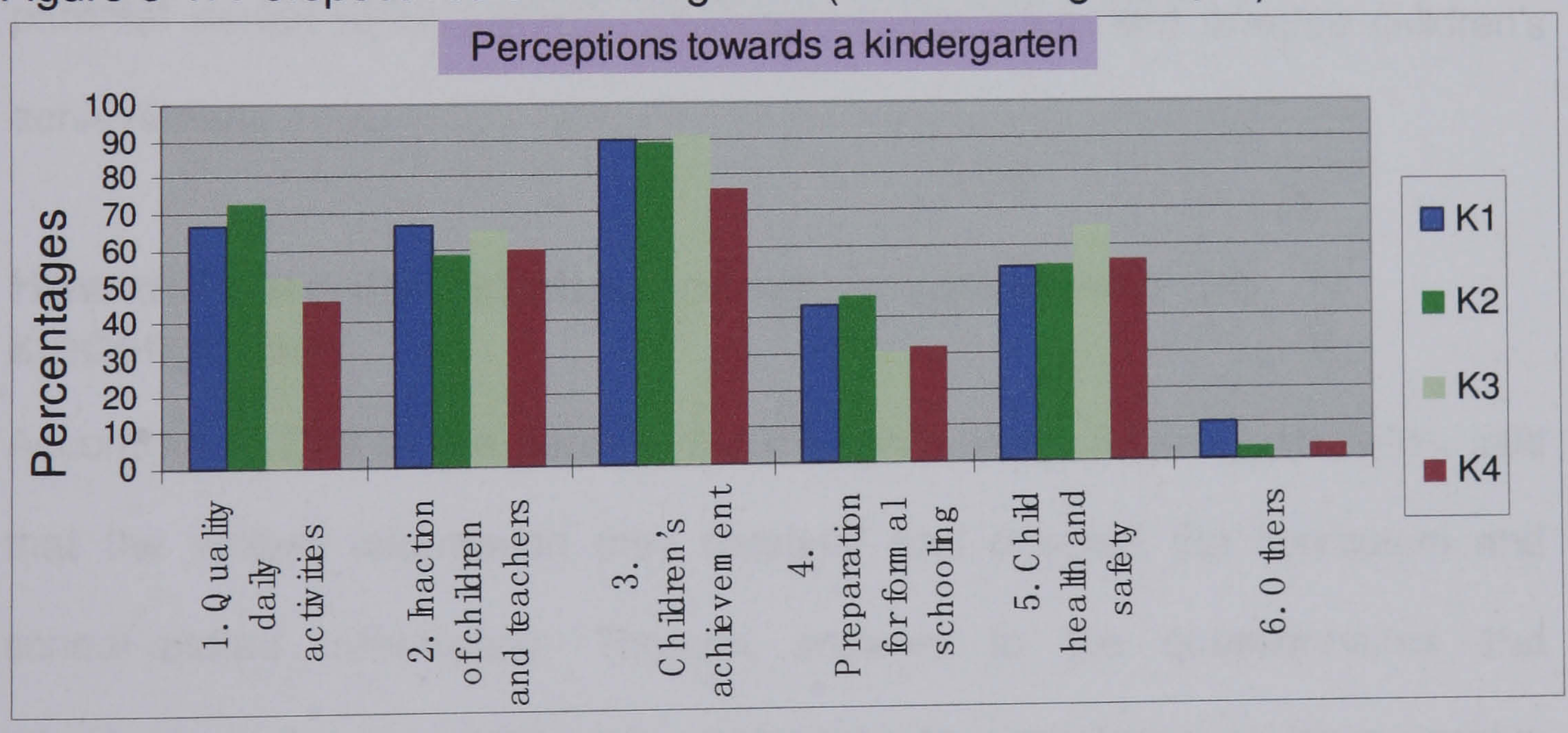
According to most kindergarten parents, the physical environment of the kindergarten was not seen as a significant factor, likely to impact on children's learning. For most parents, the interpersonal environment, teachers' attitudes towards children, peer relationships, and security were their main concerns. As

one parent stated:

> In this kindergarten, I don't worry too much about safety issues because I can always see what they do…
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-01, K1)

Most parents in this research, 87%, stated that children's achievement is the most important concern they had in regard to the kindergarten; while 63% of parents thought that interaction between teachers and children is vital. Some parents, 59%, emphasised the quality of teachers' daily teaching and learning activities, whereas 57% of parents agreed that children's health and safety issues were one of the most important concerns when children attended kindergartens. Surprisingly a relatively small number of parents, 38%, believed that good preparation for children's formal schooling was important for kindergarten (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: Perspectives on kindergarten (each kindergarten, %)



Besides the above concerns about a kindergarten, some parents in this research also expressed their desire for children to have opportunities to explore, opportunities to cultivate their own personalities, and opportunities to cultivate

teamwork. However, most respondents expressed their satisfaction with the kindergarten arrangements and education programmes available for their children. One parent expressed his ideas as follows:

> My son likes the kindergarten and he makes a lot of friends there... we can trust the kindergarten which not only provides satisfactory activities but also provides my son with essential knowledge...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-03, K4)

There were marked differences towards kindergarten and early years education, yet kindergarten parents tended to be very responsible towards their children's early learning and achievement. Even though academic achievement or formal schooling preparation were not regarded as important by every parent, most of them believed that a good early years education could have a great impact in terms of all around development and well being. Hence, most parents felt it was important to be involved in ECEC. The following section will mainly focus on parental perspectives towards kindergarten education and towards children's achievement.

How did parents feel about communication with the kindergarten?

According to Q18 in the parents' questionnaire, most respondents, 79%, said that the written information they received had covered the curriculum and school-related information. Through answers to the questionnaires and interviews during the field work, most parents were found to have positive attitudes towards the kindergarten, the teachers, and the programmes available for children. However, 94% of the respondents to the questionnaire said that the information provided was not enough and they expected more information to be

provided regarding their children. The followings are some opinions expressed by parents from each kindergarten:

> I would like to know more information about my child's development and how he relates to other children, and his social abilities.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-23-01, K3)

> I would like to know how my son gets along with other children, how he copes with difficulties, whether he eats properly, and if he is naughty at the kindergarten.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-23-23, K3)

> I would like to know the following information: 1) if my little baby gets along with other children in the kindergarten; 2) information about her studies for example, if she can concentrate during the lesson; 3) her interests, curriculum, play, etc.; 4) could the teacher analyse her potential abilities?
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-03, K4)

> I want to have more information about his eating and sleeping; his shortcomings; what are teachers dissatisfied with; how does he get along with other children; his behaviour during classes and if he can concentrate during lessons.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-14, K4)

> I want to receive information about intellectual and psychological competence in each phase of growing up.

> I'd like suggestions on how to deal with children's disobedience and naughtiness and how to help children to develop well.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-11, K2)

> I hope teachers could tell us about her bad behaviour in the kindergarten, so we can work together to improve her performance.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-20, K2)

I would like to know what's special about my son compared with his playmates (whether it's good or bad). Whether there is anything distinctive about his development.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-17, K1)

The information about how she gets along with other children. I would like the teachers to provide some written information about the daily teaching and learning.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-30, K1)

It was clear from the questionnaire survey that most parents were aware of their children's social abilities, especially the ability to get along with other people. As previously discussed, the one child policy has restructured the Chinese family, the only child has no siblings to interact with, thus, they become self-centred. According to their parents, the ability to get along with other people was regarded as an essential skill for only children to develop because it has a direct influence on their ability to integrate into a wider social world where children have to work and to compete with others.

Different views were expressed about what information should be provided by kindergartens. For example, some parents were more interested in children's progress as they grew up. Some parents wanted to know more about children's eating and sleeping habits at school. It appeared that different parents had different ideas about what information they wanted from kindergarten. However, children's social abilities, development and information related to their kindergarten lives were important. According to most parents, they would like to receive as much information as possible in order to have a better understanding of their children's lives in the kindergarten.

How did parents feel about the kindergarten curriculum?

Most parents stated that kindergartens regularly provided them with information about the curriculum. Some of them said that kindergartens provided curriculum information at the beginning of each academic term. Teachers communicated with parents generally through parents' meetings or written information. Some parents said that their knowledge about the curriculum and daily activities was limited and they would like to know more about it. Some parents even tried other ways to find out more about the curriculum. As one parent explained:

> The curriculum is a constructive one from Hua Dong Normal University (*华东师范大学*). It builds up children's knowledge step by step through five different areas... At the beginning of this term, the class teacher talked about the curriculum in the parents' meeting. They only gave a brief introduction, I felt it was not enough so I asked one of the teachers in this kindergarten (she is my friend) to lend me the curriculum. After reading it I discussed it with her to help me understand more...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-01, K1)

However, some parents had a different view of the curriculum. According to some parents, it did not matter whether they knew about the curriculum or not, what mattered was that teachers understood the curriculum and knew what they were doing. As one parent explained:

> For me, I don't think it is very necessary to have detailed curriculum information because I wouldn't use it myself. I know teachers won't have difficulties with it...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-03, K4)

Some parents felt it was unnecessary to have detailed information about the curriculum not because they were not concerned about the teachers' activities,

but because they observed their children's achievement instead. Some parents said that as long as the children had made progress, they wouldn't interfere with the teaching and learning activities or ask for more detailed curriculum information. However, there were very few parents who paid much attention to the curriculum either because they felt it was unnecessary or because they felt it was the woman's responsibility to pay more attention on children's education.

> I don't think it is very important to know the curriculum content because I am not a teacher. What I need to know is that she is learning and making progress. I am happy to see her achievements but it is unnecessary to know what she is learning in the kindergarten...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-02, K2)

> Actually, I am not the best person to fill in this questionnaire, I am doing it because my wife is not at home... My wife is a teacher and she knows more about it and has more time than I do. So we decided she takes charge of our son's education and I do my best to help her when she needs me...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-34, K2)

Parents felt the kindergartens provided enough information about the curriculum and the activities. Kindergartens regularly communicated with parents. Some parents would have liked to receive more detail about the curriculum, while other felt it unnecessary either because they, themselves, saw their children's progress or because they felt comfortable with what teachers were doing.

How were parents involved in their children's learning?

Most parents, it appeared, wanted to participate or be involved in their children's learning either at home or in kindergarten. Most teachers encouraged and welcomed parental participation in school events or in classes. As the same time,

most parents gave feedback on the arrangements that had been organised for them.

> Both my husband and I actively take part in our twins' care and learning in the kindergarten. We feel it is very important to give them support and to understand their needs. So every day I stay in the kindergarten for about 30 minutes to see them play with their friends and to see them do their morning exercises. We take part in any activities open to us, and if I saw anything that worried me, I would talk to the teachers.
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-01, K1)

> We are happy to join in the activities organised for us by the kindergarten. For example, on 1st June this year, I took part in the celebration at the kindergarten. Because my daughter was one of the dancers, I helped with making dance costumes…
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-02, K2)

Some parents expressed some concerns about how they participated in children's lives at kindergarten. According to them, better communication with teachers would help them to know more about children's lives and learning in the kindergarten as well as to exchange perspectives with teachers. Being involved in learning and taking part in kindergarten activities would be the best way for parents to know what teachers were doing through direct observation. Additionally, like some kindergarten teachers, some parents admitted that communication became much easier when they understood what teachers were doing.

How did parents feel about kindergarten teachers?

As discussed in Chapter 4, kindergarten teachers' attitudes and teaching skills have an impact on children's learning. The difference that a teacher can make

has been widely recognised not only by teachers but also by parents. Some parents in this study said that they wanted caring, patient, supportive, and kind teachers because teachers like this would do their jobs appropriately, take good care of children, and enhance their achievement. A parent explained:

> I trust my daughter's teacher... she is always patient and kind to my daughter... she is very easy to get along with...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-02, K2)

Some parents said they preferred teachers to be a 'carer' or a 'good friend' rather than a 'teacher':

> She is a good teacher... as far I have seen, she is always nice to children and patient to us, never loses her temper, always happy to play, to talk with children...
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-01, K1)

As well as being caring, kind, and patient, some parents expected kindergarten teachers to have expert teaching skills to plan more interesting, attractive, and creative activities with their children:

> It is important for kindergarten teachers to have teaching skills to attract children's attention. At this age it is more difficult for children to concentrate, so teachers should know how to appeal to children and how to give lively sessions.
>
> (Interview Notes, iP3-03, K4)

Some parents also expressed their concerns about teachers who were impatient with children. Most parents admitted they were worried about teachers who did not seem to enjoy their work with young children. According to some parents, this type of teacher had problematic attitudes towards teaching and caring for children and tended to be difficult to communicate with. As a result, these

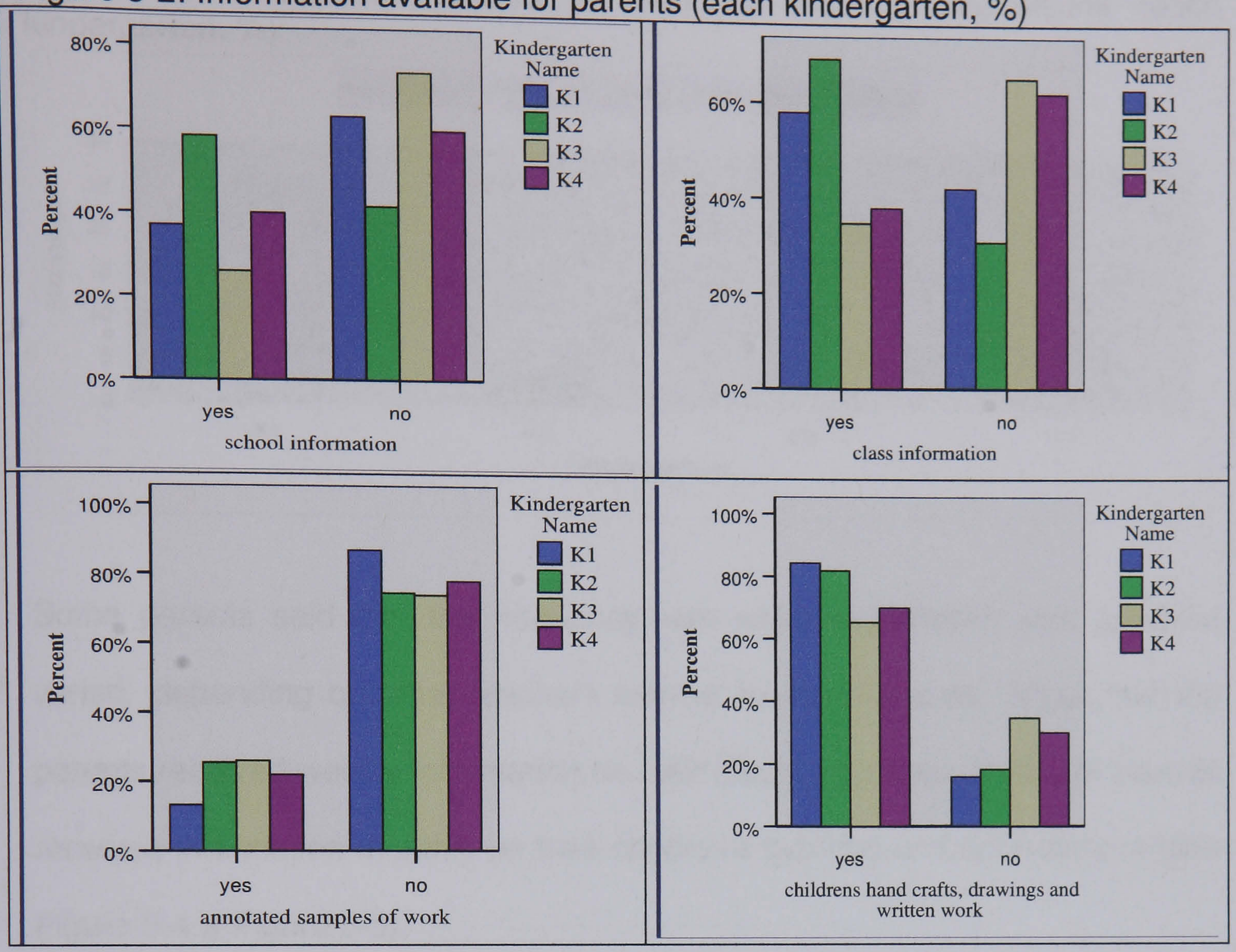
teachers would have a negative impact on children's development.

In general, most kindergarten parents were satisfied with most kindergarten teachers. For many parents, kindergarten teachers should be caring, patient, kind, supportive, and helpful. Most importantly, kindergarten teachers should be experts in conducting teaching activities. Kindergarten teachers' attitudes and teaching abilities were also one of the concerns reported by parents when choosing the kindergarten.

How did parents feel about children's achievement?

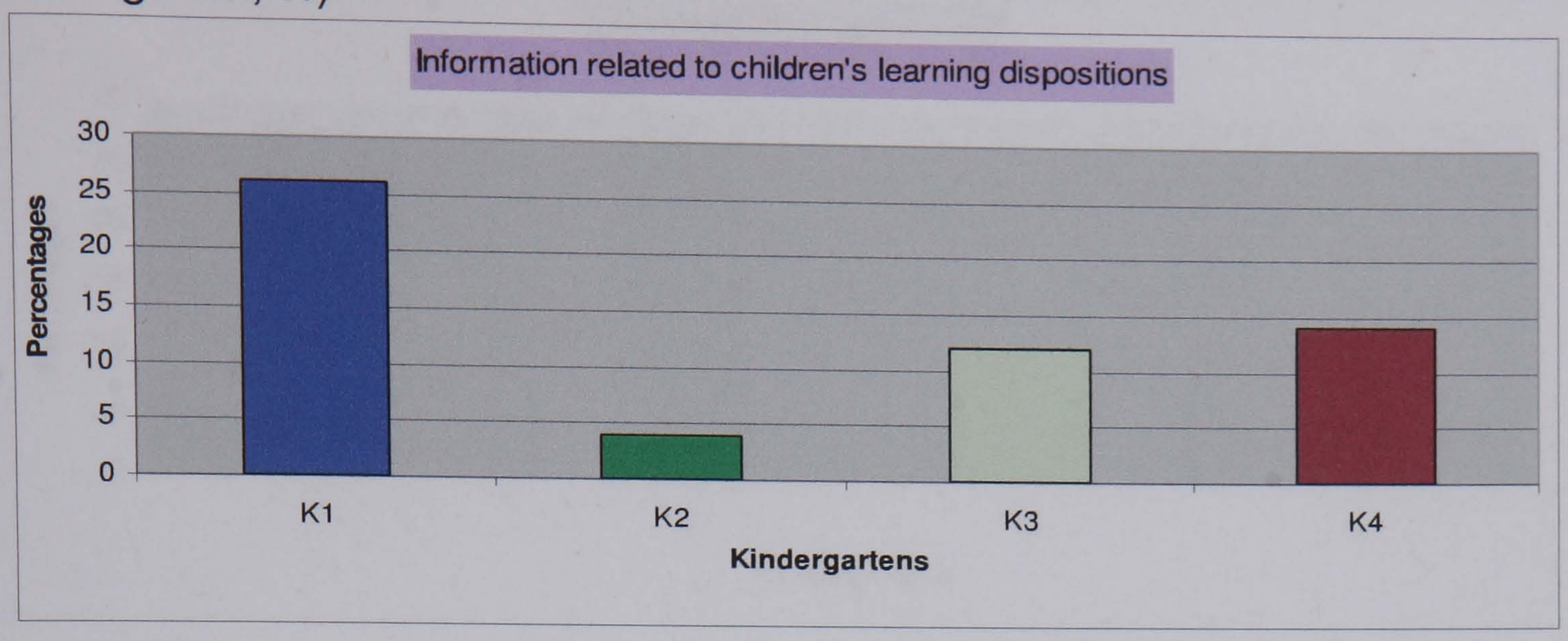
As previously discussed, most kindergarten teachers regard ECEC as important for children's all-round development and providing preparation for formal schooling. Nowadays, Chinese parents, as well as teachers, pay much attention to children's early years education and achievement. This can be seen through parental involvement in children's teaching and learning. In particular, monitoring children's achievement is vital for most Chinese parents. According to some parents, monitoring processes enable parents to understand what children have learned and achieved, and therefore, they could react accordingly. In this respect, most kindergarten parents in this research agreed on the importance of understanding what children were doing in the kindergarten as well as monitoring their learning and achievement. Consequently, parents were provided with relevant information in order to include them in their children's learning (see Figure 5-2, data obtained from Q18 in the parents' questionnaire)

Figure 5-2: Information available for parents (each kindergarten, %)



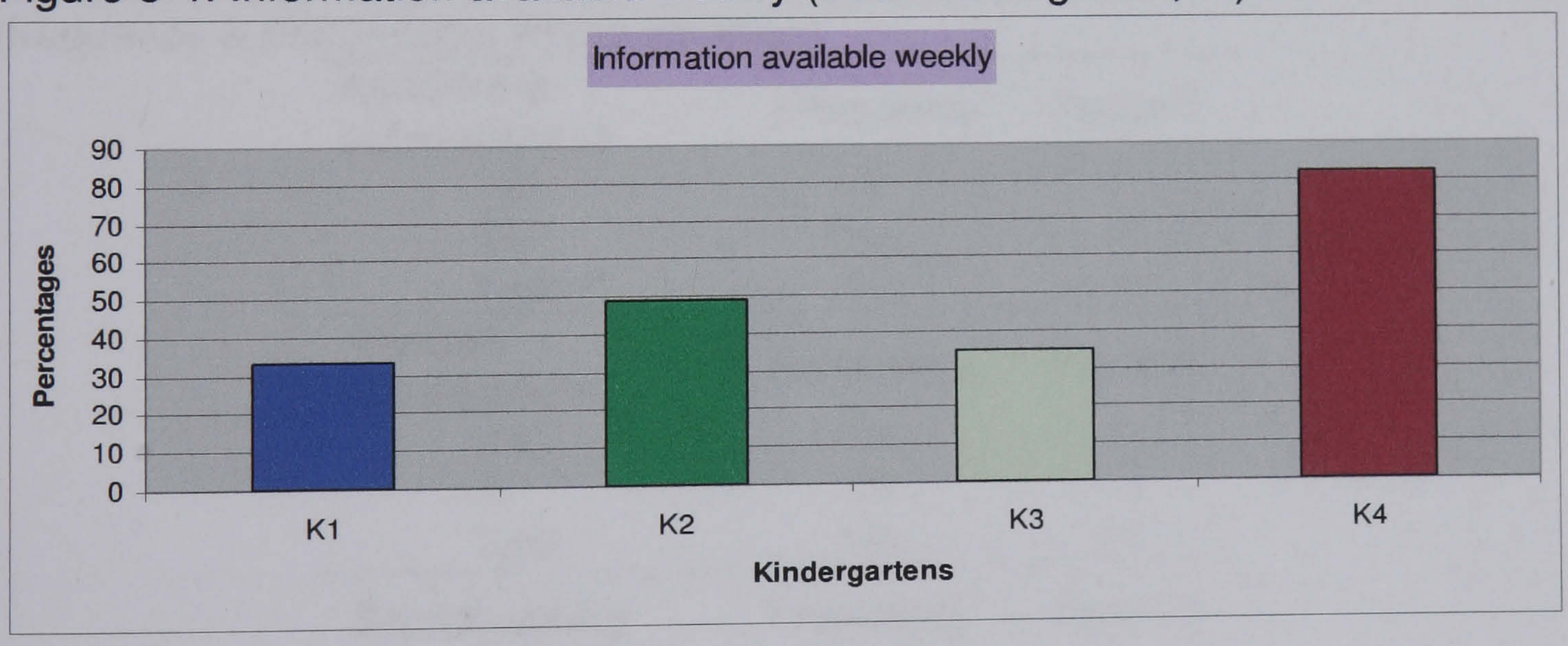
Some parents reported that the information they received sometimes included children's information about everyday events, especially negative behaviour. As discussed earlier, about 94% of parents said that the information they received was not enough and they expected more. These parents said that they would like to know more about their children's general behaviour in the kindergarten, not just bad behaviour. However, a minority of the parents said they received general behaviour reports on their children from the class teachers (see Figure 5-3).

Figure 5-3: Information related to children's learning dispositions (each kindergarten, %)



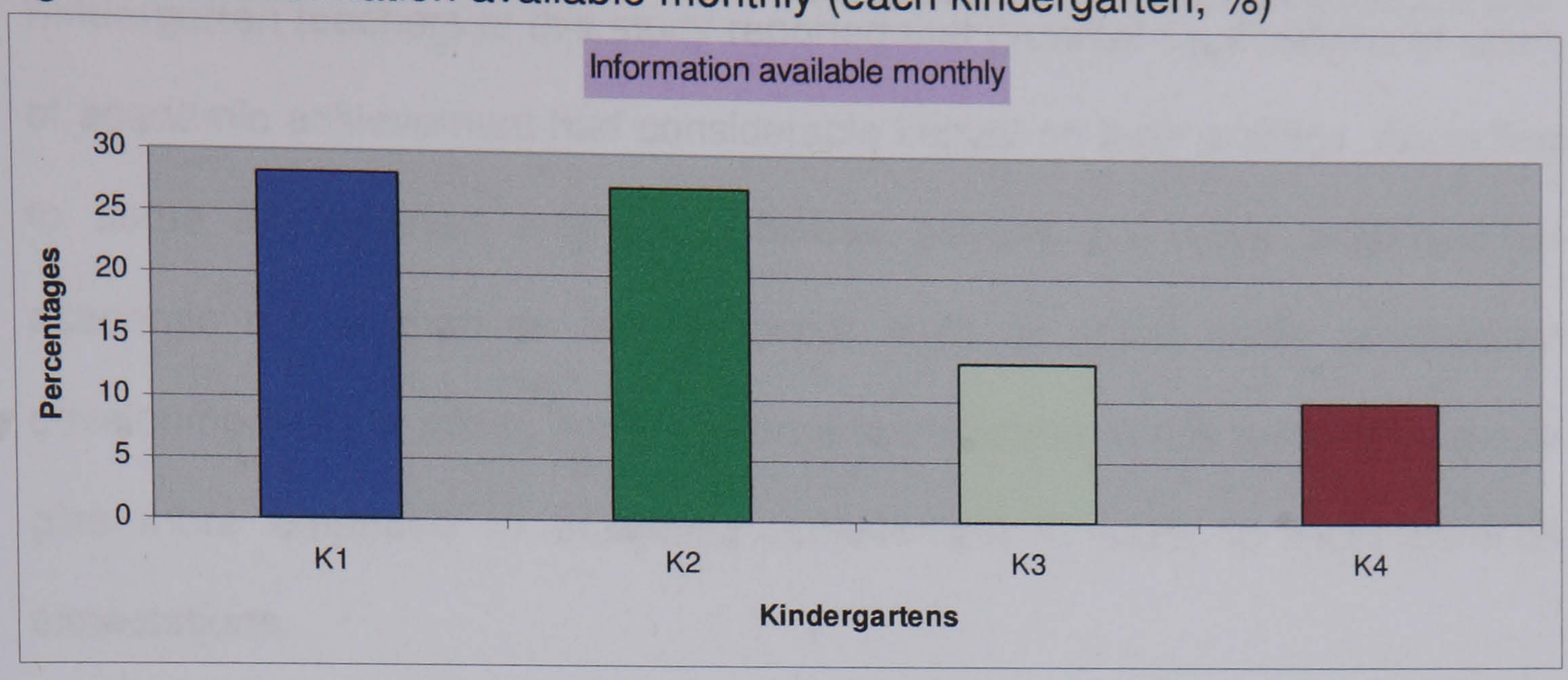
Some parents said that the frequency with which information was provided varied, depending on what teachers wanted to communicate. About half the parents received weekly information on their children and about 20% of parents received information monthly on their children's learning and achievement (see Figure 5-4 & Figure 5-5).

Figure 5-4: Information available weekly (each kindergarten, %)



Just under one fifth of parents received daily information; 14% of them received termly information about their children, and only 3% of parents stated that they received children's information only once in a year.

Figure 5-5: Information available monthly (each kindergarten, %)



Only 1% of parents felt that academic achievement was the most important aspect of kindergarten. Compared with this figure, 80% of parents believed all-round development of young children was more important; while about 20% of parents thought social ability could rank at the top among academic development and other development (see Table 5-2).

Table 5-2: Parental perceptions on the most important achievement of children (frequency & percentage, whole samples)

Academic achievement	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	2
no	165	98
Total	167	100
Overall development	Frequency	Percent
yes	135	81
no	32	19
Total	167	100
Social ability	Frequency	Percent
yes	32	19
no	135	81
Total	167	100
Others	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	2
No	164	98
Total	167	100

Kindergarten teachers in this study reported that parental expectations in terms of academic achievement had considerable impact on their practice. According to some kindergarten teachers, Chinese parents put more emphasis on academic results than on other aspects, such as social ability or all-round development. As a result, many kindergarten teachers in this research claim to give more emphasis to academic achievement in order to meet parental expectations.

However, there seemed to be large differences between kindergarten teachers' perspectives and kindergarten parents' perspectives towards children's achievement. Such differences can be explained:

Firstly, there was a wide gap between parents and teachers in terms of their views about children's achievement. Most kindergarten teachers felt that parental expectations of early years education mainly focused on children's academic achievement because they thought parents paid more attention to preparing children for future schooling. A good academic foundation would ensure children to be competitive in the future. Such misunderstandings have impacted on their practice in order to achieve this goal.

Secondly, there was an inconsistency between what parents thought and what they actually did, i.e. parents could think in one way but behave in another way. Some parents admitted that they had put pressure on their children to be excellent as well as to be competitive. As some parents said in the questionnaire:

> ...parents sometimes unconsciously put pressure on their children to achieve highly because of the importance, as they perceive it, of being

successful and capable in such a competitive society.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-09, K1)

I think early years education should prepare children with a good foundation for their primary education. In addition, it should cultivate children through various aspects.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-48, K2)

By observing the competitive climate in industries and manufacturing, I am very concerned with how cruel the future competition will be for my child. What I can do is to help him to learn better, to know how to use his knowledge, to have special skill, to have the ability to communicate. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for him to be successful...

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-03, K4)

Many parents also pointed out that peer pressure among them had forced them to make decisions for their children in order to enable them to keep up with other children. Although some parents admitted that children at their age, 3 to 6, should enjoy their childhood and to play as much as possible, they still expected their children to learn and to prepare for the future schooling. As a result, parents experienced difficulties in keeping a balance between allowing their children to enjoy childhood and preparing them for the future.

As far as I can see nowadays more and more parents are aware of the importance of early years education. More and more arrangements have been made for young children.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-24-19, K3)

Therefore, what parents did for children has resulted in inconsistency between what parents thought and what they actually did. This has had a strong impact on practitioners' practice. Consequently, as discussed in the section on difficulties of teachers, they believed that parental expectations on children's

achievement have made it difficult for them to implement ECEC policy in practice.

How did parents feel about transition to primary school?

The issue of transition to formal schooling has long been discussed by Chinese kindergarten practitioners. Many Chinese teachers and parents believed that kindergarten should provide children with sound preparation for school, including language and number skills and study habits which will help them in primary school. As previously discussed, most kindergarten teachers in this research were trying to create an atmosphere for children which would enhance their school readiness in the last term of kindergarten. Like kindergarten teachers, parents also tried to ensure a smooth transition for their children.

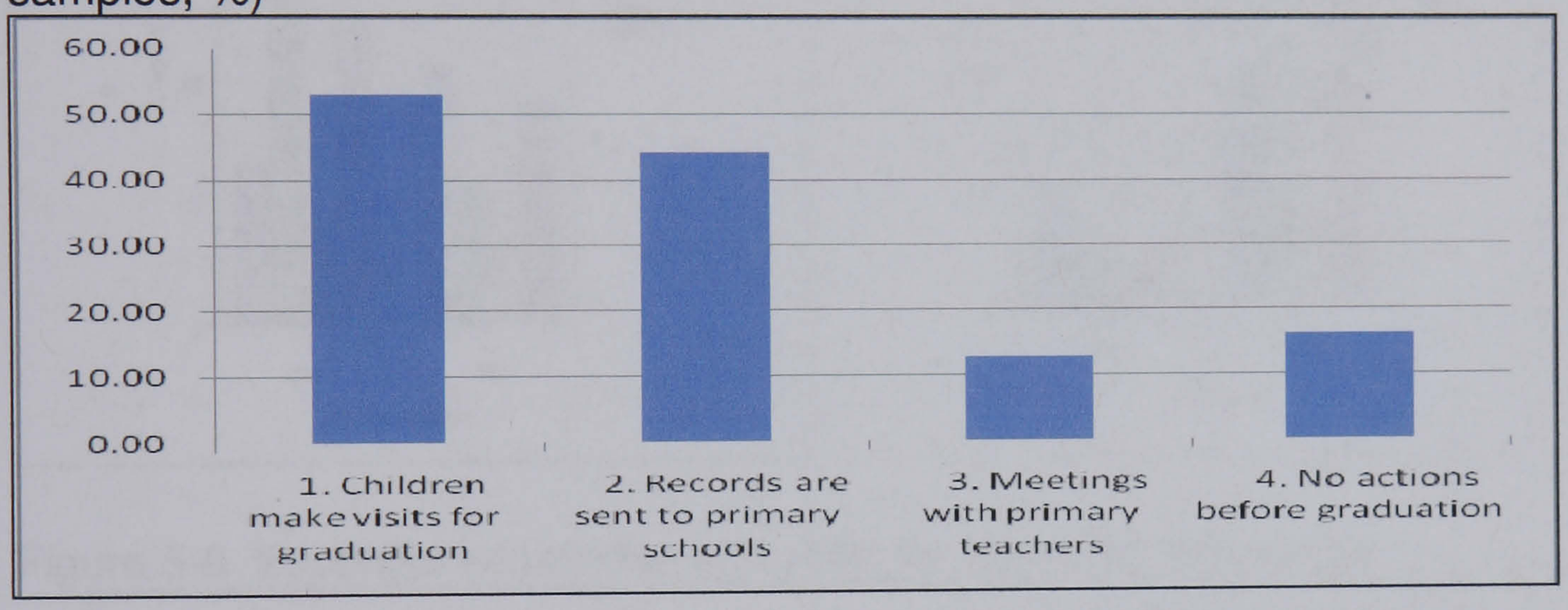
> What I am trying to do with my daughter is to cultivate good learning habits so that she will be interested in learning as well as having the capacity to concentrate on studying.
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-50-13, K4)

> I gradually introduce the information about primary school to my daughter. For example, I tell her that in the primary school, pupils are expected to have a school bag with some textbooks and a pencil box. I also tell her that in the primary school, pupils will have four lessons in the morning and three lessons in the afternoon. They have 10 minutes break between two lessons and during the break, pupils can play in the playground...
>
> (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-24-18, K3)

In this study, about 84% of the parents believed that it was necessary for each kindergarten to prepare children for the transition. Teachers were expected to familiarise children with the primary school through various means. Consequently, up to 53% of respondent parents believed children should visit

primary schools before their graduation from kindergartens. About 44% of them thought it was essential to send children's records to primary schools in order to ensure that the primary teachers had first-hand information on each child. Some respondent parents, 13%, believed it was necessary for them to talk to the primary teachers so that they could find out what they can do to prepare for transition. However, there were 16% of parents who said that they had not done anything to prepare for the graduation. For those parents, the preparation for transition seemed unnecessary for their children (see Figure 5-6 & Figure 5-7).

Figure 5-6: Parental perception about preparing for transition (whole samples, %)



Apart from above requirements for teachers, parents in this research also expressed the view that children should have certain knowledge in order to study in primary school (see Figure 5-8). The expectations of children's knowledge as well as understanding of formal schooling were explained by some parents in their statements:

Figure 5-7: Parental perception about preparing for transition (frequency, each kindergarten)

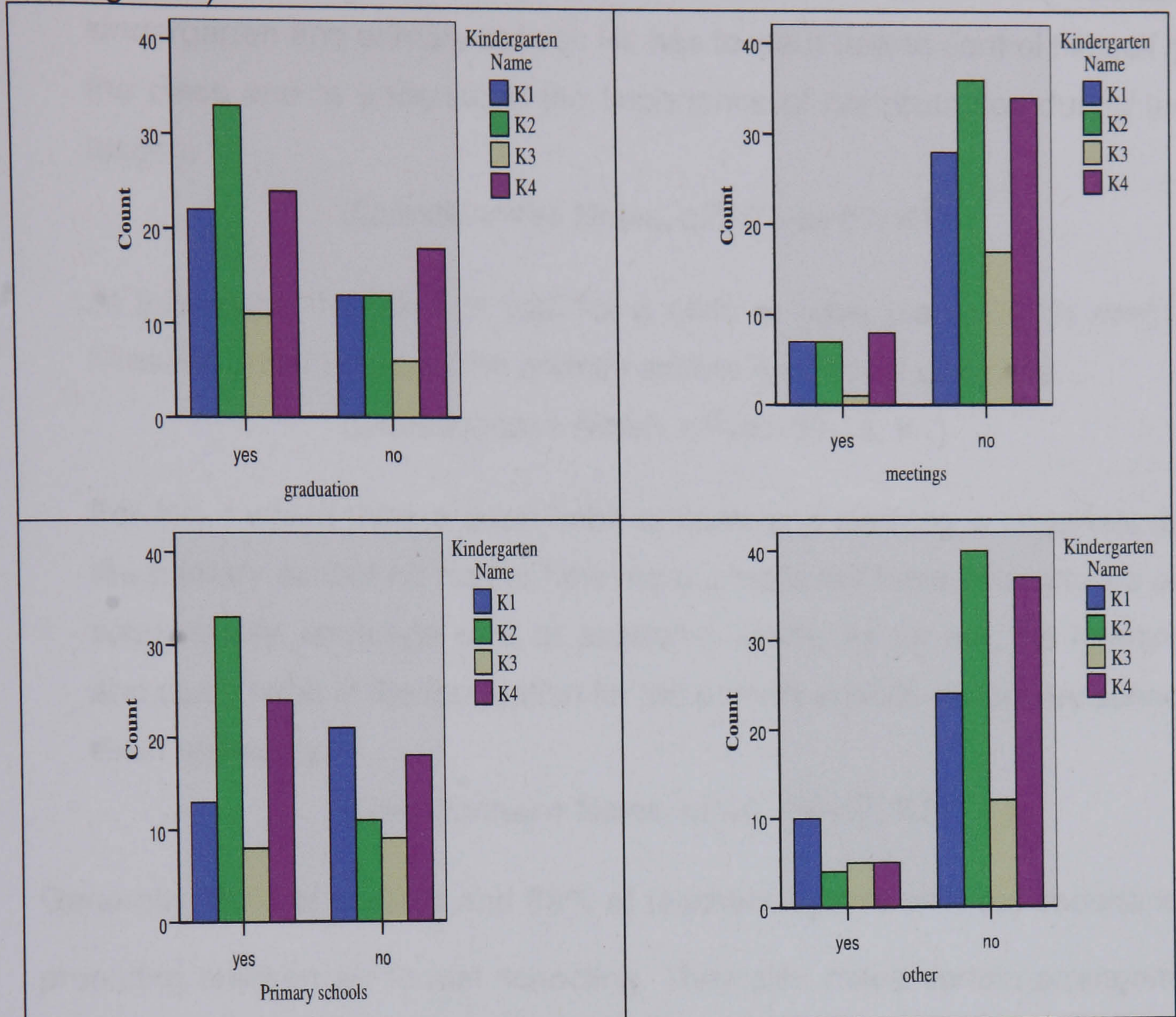
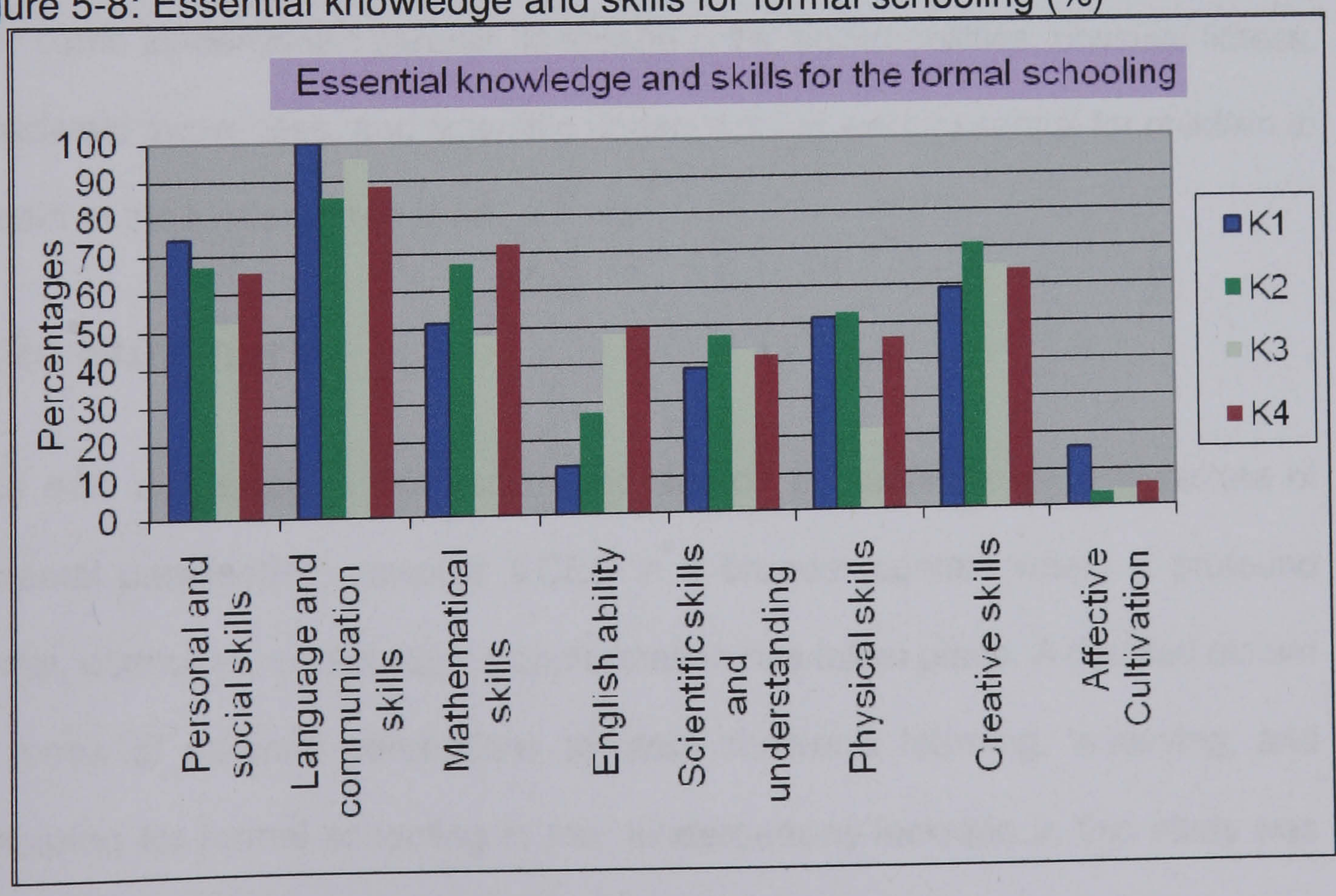


Figure 5-8: Essential knowledge and skills for formal schooling (%)



It is very important for my son to understand the differences between kindergarten and primary school. He has to learn how to control himself in the class and to understand the importance of concentration during the lesson.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-07, K1)

At this stage, I think it is vital for a child to have the ability to control himself/herself because the primary school is all about discipline...

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-39-14, K1)

For me, I would think a good habit of study and learning is important for the primary school no matter how many emphases have been placed on social ability, language skill, or academic ability. As for me, the learning and study habit is the foundation for the primary school, secondary school, even university.

(Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-37, K2)

Generally, 84% of parents and 89% of teachers agreed with the importance of preparing children for formal schooling. They also made certain arrangements accordingly, for example familiarising children with the situation in primary school. For some kindergarten parents, language skills, social abilities, physical fitness, academic awareness, and scientific understanding were essential for children to obtain at the kindergarten level.

5.2c Summary

The data discussed in this section focused on presenting a general picture of parental perspectives towards ECEC in a broader context where a profound social, economic, and political transformation has taken place. A detailed picture in terms of parental perceptions towards children's learning, achieving, and preparing for formal schooling in four kindergartens included in this study was

presented. In so doing, a holistic picture of parental perspectives in the preschool setting has been given.

Generally, kindergarten parents in this study were satisfied with what teachers were doing for their children. However, it appeared there were misunderstandings between parents and teachers which have resulted in some difficulties within the preschool setting. It is suggested that there should be more communication between parents and practitioners. Also, inconsistency between what parents thought and what they actually did was also revealed in this study. Thus, further actions should be taken in order to bridge the gap between parents' thoughts and actions.

Conclusion

The data discussed in this chapter focused on teachers' and parents' perspectives and understandings of ECEC and how their perceptions and understandings affect their practice. Difficulties which teachers' have faced in terms of implementing ECEC policy were presented and discussed in order to identify how the implementation was affected by certain factors, for example parental influences, gaps between the policy and what happens in daily practice. In addition, by comparing their perspectives, for instance perceptions towards academic achievement, it aimed to classify similarities or differences between parents and teachers. It was argued in this research that both parents' and practitioners' (head teachers and teachers) perceptions and understandings have shaped the implementation of ECEC policy in practice.

Kindergarten teachers understood the importance of ECEC for children's

all-round development and school readiness. They were also aware that great changes have been made in ECEC in terms of teaching and learning for both teachers and children. However, although great changes have been made since the 1990s, kindergarten teachers still faced pressure to enhance children's achievement and learning outcomes. Therefore, a big gap has been perceived between the policy and practice in the pre-school setting. It was observed in this study that kindergarten teachers had to make different arrangements from the prescribed curriculum in order to meet actual needs where more emphasis is placed on children's learning outcomes.

As discussed earlier, kindergarten education has been seen as less important than other phases of education, and less support has been provided for kindergarten practitioners. As a result, kindergarten practitioners encounter many difficulties in their daily practice. They have not only faced the pressure of enhancing children's achievement and preparing them for formal schooling but also the pressure of meeting both parental expectations and policy regulations. Thus, most kindergarten teachers wanted more support and training in order to cope with the implementation of policy. Moreover, some respondents called for communication between policy makers, preschool practitioners, and parents in order to understand actual needs.

For kindergarten parents, engaging in early learning was essential for children to build up a foundation for future schooling as well as enhancing capacities for excellence and to be competitive. Kindergarten was regarded as the main sector to help parents to foster the development of their children. Therefore, good quality kindergarten education was seen to be the basis of children's

development. It was observed in this study that the choice of kindergarten was influenced by parental concerns. Yet, the quality of education programmes was not the only aspect that influenced parental choices. The safety issue, practitioners' attitudes and activities available for children largely influenced their choices. The socio-economic background of parents did not affect their choice of kindergarten.

As previously mentioned, Chinese parents feel highly responsible for children's learning and achievement. Such responsibility is particularly emphasised currently due to severe competition in the society as a result of the social, economic, and political changes. The one child policy, in particular, has changed the structure of the family as well as the perception of child education. Since the only child receives the full attention of the whole family, he/she is expected to achieve future success and have an elite job in order to support children, parents, and parents-in-law.

A further discussion of parental perspectives and understandings of specific daily programmes in real settings was carried out in order obtain a holistic picture of kindergarten education. In general, the involvement of parents in kindergarten programmes has been widely welcomed by teachers because it is believed that the involvement of parents can enhance the consistency of children's behaviours at home and in the kindergarten. Parents felt positive towards the curriculum, teachers, and learning outcomes. However, differences between parents' and teachers' perspectives in terms of academic achievement were observed. A more in-depth discussion of these issues will be conducted in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 Theorising Policy Implementation and Kindergarten Practices

Introduction

In this chapter, the analysis of findings presented in Chapter 4 and 5 will be brought together. A detailed discussion will be conducted to theorise the implementation of policy and every day practice in the Chinese early years settings. The data presented in the previous two chapters described how ECEC policy was translated to practice and how practitioners carried out daily activities on the basis of their interpretation. A holistic picture of the interpretation and implementation as well as practice and perception in the actual preschool settings was generated. Moreover, the discussion will further focus on relevant factors which influence the implementation and practice in Chinese preschool sectors.

6.1 Interpreting the findings: personal perspectives and reflection

In this study, the researcher adopted both inside-out and outside-in status when designing and conducting the study. In addition, she also applied postmodern approach to understand the collected data. Through postmodern lens, the researcher tried to propose the 'uncertainty, diversity, and multiple perspectives' (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999, p.22) over the 'taken for granted' (Mac Naughton, 2005) kindergarten implementation and practice in Chinese context. In so doing, the findings presented in the previous two chapters can be interpreted more clearly.

As for this study, it is apparent that the researcher's personal perspectives towards researching in Chinese context while further understanding the collected data considerably affect how the findings should be interpreted and presented. Therefore, it is necessary in this part of the chapter to reflect on the researcher's personal perspectives and to make explicit her personal position when understanding the data.

As previously discussed, the lens, through which the collected data were interpreted and given meaning, was based on deconstructing traditional Chinese perspectives towards child education and reconstructing current ECEC on both internal and external aspects. It is argued in this study that current Chinese ECEC implementation and practice cannot be simply understood by using either traditional perspectives or purely Western theories. It further argued that only when positioning current implementation and practice in a framework where both traditional cultural values and contemporary transformation (with Western influences) are taken into consideration, the implementation, practice, and even practitioners' and parents' perspectives can be understood better.

In such respect, the follow sections will mainly reflect on kindergarten practices by engaging with practice at the practical level and perspectives of kindergarten practitioners and parents. Through postmodern lens, the day to day practice and individual perspectives will further give meanings which to some extents might reveal 'uncertainty or multiple perspectives' in the process of implementation (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 1999, p.22). Meanwhile, such reflection on the practice will also provide clear views towards policy implementation and individual perspectives.

6.2 Kindergarten practices: the implementation of policy

The discussion will be based on the findings presented in the previous two chapters in order to understand how ECEC policy was perceived and carried out in daily practice in each kindergarten in this research. It is believed through the discussion of policy implementation, issues embedded in the process of implementation and practice will be identified. The discussion of policy implementation will further engage with issues related to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. In so doing, the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level can be understood in accordance with both traditional Chinese child rearing perspectives and current changes in perspectives on child education in Chinese society.

6.2a The influence of the official discourse on each kindergarten

As previously presented, the early years education in the official and political discourse mainly focused on fostering the type of education proposed in the kindergarten education guidance (2001) for children at age 3 to 6. It was further expected to enhance the intellectual development and school readiness. Kindergartens, thus, were regarded as the major institution to foster such all-round development and readiness. As observed in this research, selected kindergartens put this focus on the top of their agenda.

The examination of the discourse at the official and political level revealed that the education and readiness for formal schooling have been given great emphasis since 1980s when a series of educational policies were constituted. In

these early policies, there was dual concern for the national responsibility to foster children's achievement as well as education for national development. However, in the past two decades, these policies have been further amended to focus more on children. In particular, children's well-being and welfare has become the central focus. Consequently, areas of specific knowledge as well as personal and health issues have been covered in the Chinese version of 'holistic development' of young children.

Nevertheless, the collective ideology has influenced policy making as well as policy implementation. It was observed that the social and economic environment varies significantly in different parts of China. Likewise, the implementation of policy varied due to the particular economic and social contexts. Therefore, it is argued in this research that the highly centralised policy-making system seems problematic, causing problems in the process of implementation and practice. One particular example observed in this research was that the private kindergarten was regulated by the same kindergarten education guidance (2001) as state kindergartens. Yet training programmes available to their teachers were different from those in state kindergartens. Further evidence regarding such problematic issues will also be included in the later discussion.

'Kindergarten should not only provide children with opportunities to learn and to play, but create a whole atmosphere to underpin children's development (Questionnaire Notes, qP167-55-39, K2)' was suggested by a respondent parent. It is clear from this research that the hidden curriculum of kindergarten had greatly impacted on children's learning and development. Consequently, the

kindergartens in this research tried to improve such factors within the kindergarten through enhancing the physical environment and making the best available of facilities.

In terms of enhancing the physical environment, the kindergartens in this research focused on creating a friendly and comfortable environment for young children. It was observed, when visiting the kindergartens, that the general environment of each kindergarten was very similar although institutional features were different. The major task was to create a friendly, caring, interesting, creative, and collaborative atmosphere in the school. Children, thus, unconsciously developed the sense of harmony, aesthetics, and imagination. Additionally, children were also involved in decorating the school. It was observed that many children's drawings, handicrafts, and pictures were hung on walls along corridors.

Moreover, in the case of facilities, kindergartens were seen to provide as many facilities as they can to enhance the learning environment for the young children. However, advanced facilities such as computers and multi-media teaching centres were not available in each kindergarten because of different levels of financial resources.

The emphasis on children as the centre of education programmes was also observed in each kindergarten. Such shifts in the preschool settings reflect general changes in the national policy which highlights children's health, safety, and welfare. In addition, arrangements in terms of curriculum implementation to enhance children's achievement and to integrate parents in the education of young children were practised in each kindergarten. Therefore, in the next

section, a further discussion of these arrangements will be included.

6.2b Learning at the kindergartens

As mentioned in the previous section, a series of curriculum activities enhancing children's moral, intellectual, physical, personal, social, and general well-being were planned and put into practice. The curriculum was seen as the major channel through which to enhance children's overall development and to endow them with essential knowledge and skills for their future schooling. Thus, enhancement of knowledge and preparation for school were placed at the core of the kindergarten's educational goals. The following section discusses and analyses the curriculum arrangements regarding the enhancement of teaching and learning efficiency in preschool settings and teachers' role and efficacy when implementing the curriculum.

Curriculum organisation for children's learning

Teaching and learning activities were understood to be among the major influences on children's learning outcomes. Consequently, Chinese kindergartens arranged different activities to foster development and achievement. It was found that each kindergarten in this study provided similar activities to foster children's all around development and enhance their school preparedness. Firstly, each kindergarten provided the basic curriculum including the minimum teaching and learning activities according to the official Guidance (2001). Secondly, besides the basic curriculum, other special activities were organised daily in each kindergarten. These provided opportunities to foster extra achievements in foreign language (English), artistic performance (singing

and dancing), and physical development (motor coordination).

Finally, kindergartens in this study also promoted extra-curricula activities. In the kindergartens visited, activities such as drama, performing, brass band, and pottery making were carried out to engage children in different forms of learning. It was widely accepted that parental involvement in children's teaching and learning can make a contribution to their children's learning. As a result, the kindergartens in this study arranged programmes to integrate parents into their children's learning. It was found that each kindergarten conducted similar activities to encourage parental involvement in the form of a parents' room, parents' day, parents' evening, and parents' classes. Despite different parental socio-economic backgrounds, parents indicated that they wanted to be involved in children's learning. Teachers, in particular, wanted to establish good relations with parents in order to build up a consistent learning environment both at home and in the kindergarten. Therefore the next part of this section will focus on teachers' roles in implementing the curriculum.

Curriculum implementation and teachers' practice

The teachers interacted closely with young children within the kindergarten. Most importantly, the teachers decided how to organise their curriculum by choosing what to teach and how to teach it. In this study, it was found that the teachers from each kindergarten tended to teach only selected parts of the curriculum. The reason for this was mainly because some parts of the curriculum were difficult to organise. This may be due to safety concerns or being technically unavailable for teachers. Therefore, teachers in this research reported that they either conducted an alternative session with similar contents

or skipped the session when it was difficult to meet the requirement of the guidance.

Nevertheless, teachers' experiences, teaching skills, and training undertaken largely impacted on the way they implement the curriculum. It appeared that the more experienced the teacher, the easier she organised a curriculum. Training and professional development which most teachers have undertaken, also impacted on a teacher's conduct of teaching activities. In the Chinese context, teachers' implementation of policy and their practice have been significantly influenced by the achievement orientated situation. High expectations of children in terms of intellectual development, language development, social skills, school preparedness, among other aspects, also impacted on the kindergartens and also on the teachers. Under such circumstances, the issue of teachers' training and professional development largely determined the quality of kindergarten programmes and teachers' efficacy when implementing policy and dealing with delivering the curriculum for young children.

Interactions among teachers, parents, and children

As previously mentioned, in order to help parents understand kindergarten education and care and to meet different expectations of child development, several arrangements were in place. Involving parents in kindergarten daily activities was regarded as the most efficient arrangement to achieve both intentions. On the one hand, parents took part in kindergarten teaching and learning activities through directly observing and participating. On the other hand, they also gained opportunities to internalise what their children were learning and the progress made by the children.

However, the social and economic transformation in contemporary China has changed the general perspectives towards the child and childhood. Regarding parents, they are treated, to some extent, as customers who are empowered to question the quality of children's education to meet their satisfaction. The parents in this study were also empowered by actively engaging with children's learning. Teachers, therefore, managed to meet their expectations and satisfaction through carefully organised activities. Teachers were cautiously aware of how parental involvement could influence their daily practice. As a result, many respondent teachers stated that although they took parental suggestions or expectations into consideration when planning, they still remained in control in their teaching practice.

Besides, teachers prepared reports related to children's learning and achievement for parents. Parents, thus, received detailed information on their children's behaviours, handicrafts, and learning. The records were also kept for teachers. It was observed that some kindergarten teachers used children's reports to communicate with parents. In terms of professional development, some kindergarten teachers used children's reports for annual reviews as well as for teaching plans. The information was used during staff development through reviewing the developmental progress of each child.

6.2c The professional development of kindergarten teachers

It was found in this study, most teachers only had a basic qualification or training before starting the career. In order to enhance or improve the overall qualification of kindergarten teachers, various training programmes, resources,

and other relevant activities were available to teachers. In addition, the kindergarten teachers also voluntarily undertook distance training courses or distance degree courses for their own personal improvement. However, individual teachers did not get extra support in terms of time and money for such personal enhancement (Bai, 2006a; Bai, 2006b). Under such circumstances, the teachers were entitled to attend any courses in accordance with their preferences that were not always related to their professional needs or courses to enhance their early years education knowledge. Most importantly, the teachers attended those courses in their spare time including winter and summer holidays in order to avoid the confliction between work and study.

The reason for undertaking these courses was mainly due to plans for making a career change. On the one hand, these kindergarten teachers faced intensive pressure from employers with relatively low pay but heavy workloads. Some kindergarten teachers stated that if they had the opportunity they would have changed their jobs for better career perspectives. On the other hand, some of them stated that even though they would not change their jobs, better financial conditions were another incentive to undertake an extra training or degree course. In general, it appeared that the undertaking of extra training, regardless of whether it was kindergarten initiative or for personal development, influenced teachers' behaviours and knowledge in a major way.

6.2d Kindergarten practices: impacts and implications

As already discussed, the teachers directly interacted with young children everyday in the kindergartens and influenced children in a major way. In this

respect, the attitudes and skills of the kindergarten teacher were highly emphasised by employers and parents. To improve teachers' skills and enhance their responsibilities has become the major issue in kindergartens. Various rules and regulations were developed mostly by the kindergartens and a few by local education authorities, to guide the performance of kindergarten teachers.

It appeared in this research that most kindergarten teachers felt positively towards children and were highly responsive to issues related to children. They used various teaching methods and skills to ensure the quality of their practice, to integrate children into teaching activities, to enhance learning outcomes, and to comfort children when necessary. Some kindergarten teachers also used their abilities and skills in drawing and craft making to help with kindergarten decoration and to make extra toys for children (Bai, 2006b).

It was also observed that teachers' attitudes both towards children and to their jobs highly impacted on the quality of practice. Teaching activities, in particular, largely depended on teachers' preparation. If a teacher has a positive attitude regarding the job or the children, teaching activities can be prepared appropriately in terms of methods used, materials available, and special arrangement made. Conversely, if the teacher is highly demotivated, it is unlikely that she will deliver good quality practice (Bai, 2007). In addition, because the kindergarten teachers are highly accountable for children's learning, development, and achievement, it is essential for teachers to have positive attitudes towards children and teaching, to obtain skills to conduct teaching activities, and to be responsive to children related issues.

In the kindergartens visited in this study, different activities were provided for

children on a daily basis. Because of the large class sizes and pressure of safety issues, kindergarten teachers struggled to find a balance between education and care. To do so, activities organised in different ways were conducted in each kindergarten where teachers shared responsibilities and workloads. For example, children were divided into different groups and rotated through different activities led by different teachers.

However, most respondent teachers in this research tended to carry out whole class activities despite the claim of heavy workloads and high responsibilities. It seemed that whole class activities were easier to manage because each child did not require individual attention. Children, therefore, were taught in the same manner without considering individual differences among children. Moreover, children's special educational needs or high abilities were not taken into consideration in the curriculum nor in the teaching practice.

Although whole class activities were preferred by most kindergarten teachers to keep children busy or to reduce workloads and responsibilities, small group activities were also employed to motivate individual learning and to promote interaction between teachers and children. However, grouping strategies used by most kindergarten teachers seemed problematic by raising the question of defining 'ability'. It was found that most kindergarten teachers used 'ability' as the major measurement to group children. Consequently, the question of defining 'ability' of each child has become the main issue for kindergarten teachers as no assessment or evaluation criteria were available in the current curriculum.

Teachers were observed to give little time for children to carry out self-initiated play due to concerns related to parental expectations and achievement pressure.

For most kindergarten teachers, children's achievement can be assessed through acquisition of literacy and numeracy. However, self-initiated play was considered to be difficult to control, thus, it was not preferred by some kindergarten teachers who felt pressured by parents,

Monitoring the achievement of children in the preschool phase has long been a concern for education authorities, teachers, and parents. In this research, both teachers and parents noted that achievement did not merely mean academic results but had a broader meaning including social, personal, scientific, linguistic, physical, and creative improvement. Most kindergarten teachers in this study worked towards cultivating the all-round development of children through carefully designed teaching activities.

It was observed within these kindergartens that emphasis on achievement of children aged 3 to 6 were varied. Perceptions towards language skills, personal abilities, or physical abilities of a kindergarten directly affected teachers' perspectives and practice. It is believed that teachers' understanding of the curriculum and practice is highly structured by training programmes and kindergarten concerns. It is argued in this research that the kindergarten teachers' understandings of the curriculum can be shaped by institutional concerns and professional enhancement. Subsequently, reporting children's achievement was also emphasised in this research. It was observed that teachers have been working constantly to record children's information in terms of learning, behaviour, and achievement. Most parents, thus, stated that they were satisfied with the information recorded by teachers. However, some parents expressed the need for more information related to their children's daily

behaviours within the kindergarten as well as interactions with their peers. It seems that for most parents there is a need for guidance on child education. This will be further discussed in the later section where parental perspectives will be presented.

Kindergarten teachers and parents also present their perspectives towards children's achievement at age 3 to 6. Both teachers and parents agree that language ability is the most important aspect that needs to be developed at this stage of schooling. It seems that the acquisition of mathematical concepts is less important for parents and for teachers. Compared with parents, teachers from different kindergartens have very different perspectives towards children's scientific understanding of the world. It also appears that parents have more concerns about children's affective cultivation while no teachers have expressed similar concerns in their questionnaires. Minor differences in children's education between teachers and parents have been detected in this research. It is observed that there should be more communication in order to improve understanding between teachers and parents. In so doing, the ECEC curriculum could be better implemented in line with real needs and expectations.

6.2e Teaching and learning for formal schooling

Kindergarten is regarded as the essential place to prepare children for formal schooling. As a result, children from age three are gradually trained for future schooling through a series of activities. These aim to improve overall abilities in terms of language skills, numerical sense, learning habits. Preparedness for formal schooling is a high priority of by both teachers and parents. To ensure

children were fully prepared for the formal schoolings, most kindergarten teachers admitted that they worked with parents to create an atmosphere to ensure a smooth transition for children. However, there were still many kindergarten teachers who had not taken any action in regard to children's transition, in particular, the teachers in the private kindergarten selected in this research.

The transition to primary schooling becomes a difficult task for some kindergartens due to the lack of direct connection between kindergartens and local primary schools. Although preschool education is an essential component of Chinese basic education, it does not belong to the nine-year compulsory education. In other words, Chinese parents can choose any preschool according to their preference. However, the choice of primary schools is related to the district where the family is registered which means that parents can only choose the primary schools within their district. Consequently, the preparation for transition is only related to familiarising children with general or universal rules of the primary school.

6.2f Summary

In this part of the chapter, the research findings in terms of how preschool education policy is perceived and translated into daily practice are brought together in order to prepare for further discussion. As observed from the findings presented in the previous chapter and the discussion in the current chapter, it was found that despite the different institutional features among these four kindergartens, great similarities were also found regarding the conceptualisation

of early childhood policy, the implementation of the policy into daily practice, and the arrangement of the curriculum.

As argued in Chapter 2, based on the current social, economic, and political transformation, ECEC is shaped by social expectations towards the child, childhood, and child development. It is argued in this study that in contemporary China, expectations of early childhood education have been influenced by social environments (i.e. family structure changes as a result of the one child policy; greater number of immigrants from rural areas to metropolitan areas); cultural expectations (e.g. Western influences brought by globalisation, as well as entering WTO); political changes (reforms within the education system; more emphases on quality than on 'test-orientated' education); and educational perspectives (e.g. education as a vehicle for social mobility and as a tool for competitive enhancement).

Chinese early childhood education is also influenced by the broader beliefs of the Chinese society. The traditional perspective towards the child, childhood, and child education based on theories of social constructivism (Yan, 2000) and Confucianism have constantly influenced teachers, parents, and the society. Such influences have significantly shaped Chinese behaviours and beliefs on ECEC. In this respect, practitioners' practice is also highly influenced by both traditional cultural foundations and contemporary perspectives brought by the profound transformation.

Apart from these similarities among kindergartens, some differences were also identified including differences in preparation for formal schooling, teachers' attitudes towards parents, parental involvement, and expectations, and school

policy. It is not difficult to find out that the reason for such differences among these sectors was mainly related to the administrative related ideologies of the settings. It is argued that although there are no differences at policy level (i.e. national and provincial level) of early childhood education, there are differences at the practical (i.e. each preschool sector) level due to fundamental differences regarding management and finance among the kindergartens.

As discussed previously, at the policy level (national and provincial level) educational policies are constituted by the Communist Party, Ministry of Education or governing body (Yan, 2000). It was observed, on the one hand, Chinese educational policies are highly centralised and controlled by the central government. On the other hand, no further guidance in relation to these has been given from the policy making level to the practical level. The implementation of policy, therefore, is highly dependent on each individual sector's interpretation and practice.

However, the management of each individual kindergarten is also affected by the Communist ideology and political structures (Lewin *et al.*, 1994). It was observed in this research that a dual governing system has existed in Chinese preschool sectors including the Communist Party and the professionals (both party and non-party members). It seems such dual governing structure has always created issues when balancing the Party-related matters and the day to day decisions and practices. In particular, sometimes the issue would relate to the implementation of policy into practice.

At the practical level, the Communist ideology and culture impacts on the implementation of early childhood education policy into practice. It is observed

that the Communist ideology, including collectivism has permeated the kindergarten education. On the one hand, it influences teachers' practice by constituting mono-policy without considering different problems that arise in the implementation; on the other hand, the collective perspectives also affect teachers' behaviours and attitudes by promoting the benefit of a harmonious society (Yan, 2000) where individual interests can be sacrificed in order to pursuit the benefit of people or the nation (Yan, 2000).

Consequently, at both policy and practice level, the kindergarten implementation and practice are organised through balancing policy and the actual situation. However, negotiation at the practical level has posed difficulties because of the 'top down' nature in the Chinese government. It seems that it is not possible for 'the voice' of kindergarten practitioners and parents to be heard while their needs have always been given little importance in this type of educational system. In this respect, the kindergarten practitioners and parents' needs can rarely be met and the early childhood education policy cannot be fully carried out at the practical level.

It is argued that a multi-policies system should be constituted where differences in economics and regions can be taken into account. It is also argued that at the policy level, the influences of policy makers (whose backgrounds are not necessarily in education) should changed in order to constitute a reality-based policy for ECEC. It is also argued that communication between policy makers and practitioners can also be strengthened to build up better understandings among each sector.

6.3 Kindergarten practices: the views of practitioners and parents

In this part of the chapter, findings related to how practitioners (head teachers and teachers) and their practice and parents perceive ECEC policy are discussed. Data presented in the previous chapter has pointed out the importance of teachers' role on implementing ECEC policy in practice. Such importance has been identified through both interviews and observations in this study. However, as discussed in both Chapter 4 and 5, teachers' implementation and practice of ECEC policy are highly impacted upon by the reality including regions, economic situation, kindergarten managerial styles, and funding. Differences between what is on the policy and what actually happens in the real settings have been identified through previous discussion.

Hence, the discussion will mainly focus on teachers', positive or negative, perceptions of the gap between policy and the reality. Furthermore, tensions of the relationship between teachers and policy makers including local education authorities and kindergarten will be sought to identify how teachers' implementation and practice are shaped by balancing the tension within the relationship. The relationship between kindergarten teachers and parents is also included in the following discussion. Besides the discussion on teachers' perceptions of the implementation of ECEC policy, parents' understandings of and beliefs about ECEC in relation to child achievement and school readiness are also discussed. Subsequently, it is argued in this research that teachers' practice and parents' understandings of ECEC policy are not merely shaped by policy but also affected by the broader social, economic, and political

environment in Chinese society.

6.3a Teachers' perceptions of ECEC

The importance and demand for early childhood education for child education and school preparedness has been widely recognised by kindergarten teachers and parents. The need for ECEC in contemporary China stems from the consensus that child education has been severely affected by the broader social context including changes in social values and educational perspectives, reconstructed family structures as a result of the one child policy, inappropriate upbringing concepts with '4-2-1 syndrome', and the growing pressure on learning and future success of young children.

The one child policy, in particular, is believed to be one of the main reasons for the belief that ECEC should ensure child development. Also, the social change with Western influences, the permeation of mass communication opportunities, and new perceptions on the child and childhood have impacted on the ECEC policy making and implementing. Consequently, most kindergarten practitioners admitted that such changing perspectives were constantly shaping the daily practices.

China, as previously discussed, has adopted a centralised policy making system (Ma *et al.*, 2006) which dramatically restricts the implementation and practice at the practical level. Thus, it resulted in problems and concerns regarding policy implementation in kindergartens selected for this research due to the economic and social environment of Jiangxi Province. In this research, kindergarten teachers' practice was shaped not only by the ECEC policy but also restricted by

the provincial environment. It appeared in this research that the emphasis on young children's learning outcomes have been placed at the centre of each kindergarten's agenda. Consequently, the kindergarten teachers' practice was conceptualised and constructed by such perspectives.

Generally, the teachers from each kindergarten understood the national policy of ECEC and follow the policy as closely as possible according to the general kindergarten situation. It was observed in this research that respondent teachers follow the content of the curriculum and use the suggested teaching methods from the teacher handbooks provided to each teacher in the kindergarten. However, the curriculum content may not be fully implemented in the daily practice which was shaped by the kindergarten situation. As a result, relevant adjustments were made in each kindergarten after discussion with all teachers. The decision-making on curriculum contents was determined by teachers' professional knowledge and educational beliefs.

In order to develop teachers' professional knowledge and competence to carry out their daily practice, a series of in-service training programmes were organised by the kindergartens (i.e. K1, K2, and K3) in this study. However, the only private kindergarten in this study was observed to provide less in-service training programmes for their teachers due to the financial constraints which were more significant for kindergarten which was self-funded and profit-making. In the private kindergarten, head teachers acknowledged that in-service training cannot be made available for each teacher due to the lack of practical support from the local government. In China, state owned kindergartens receive more support from the local government being the major force behind the professional

development of teachers.

This has resulted in major differences in terms of understanding and conducting curriculum in daily practice. Although some in-service training programmes provided by state kindergartens were theoretically based, state kindergarten teachers were more skilful in adopting a wider variety of methods in their daily practice. Despite the different skills in curriculum implementation, practice in both state kindergartens and private one was still restricted by the broader contexts which were discussed in the previous section. Although changes in perceptions of the child, childhood, and child education have arisen through the profound transformation in contemporary China, the fundamental perspective towards child education has not been changed by the transformation.

Nevertheless, such high social expectations of child achievement have impacted on kindergarten teachers' perceptions and behaviours in a major way. On the one hand, the kindergarten teachers were facing the burden of implementing ECEC policy in their daily practice. On the other hand, they had to meet parents' expectation of child achievement through adopting academically relevant activities. The kindergarten teachers, thus, admitted the implementation of ECEC policy in their daily practice has become a tough task with the imbalance of what is on the policy document and what is possible to carry out in the actual situation.

This study also revealed that policy makers, kindergartens, and parents had a strong influence on kindergarten teachers' behaviours at the practical level. Firstly, the way that the policy was constituted and delivered was problematic. It resulted in difficulties at the practical level. As discussed earlier, China has a

highly centralised policy making and curriculum developing system (Ma *et al.*, 2006) where differences in terms of economic and social environments within China have long been neglected. Under such circumstances, it is not possible to meet all the needs of each individual at the practical level. Kindergartens and practitioners had to adjust practice to meet the requirement of 'universal policy' (Bai, 2007).

In addition, the communication between kindergarten practitioners and the policy making level was also problematic. It appeared the communication in the education system follows the 'top down' tradition where one way communication was the major solution to deal with policy. Both 'universal policy' and 'top down' communication patterns have shaped and in some cases restricted kindergarten teachers' daily practice by dictating what they should do in the daily practice but neglecting their actual needs when implementing the policy.

Secondly, the kindergartens were understood by most teachers as another major influence which greatly impact on teachers' practice and understanding of ECEC policy. In this research, the importance of an effective leadership in the kindergarten and the relationship between head teachers and teachers was identified. It was observed that positive leadership played a vital role in terms of motivating teachers as well as supporting them. Teachers' practices, thus, were highly influenced by the kindergarten.

In this research, the kindergartens, as observed, were the major providers of in-service training and the places where teachers' voices were heard. The kindergarten teachers in this research stated that the communication between the kindergarten (head teachers) and themselves was better than that with

upper levels including local and national government. Their voices in terms of implementation and practice can be heard and understood through both formal and informal communications with head teachers. Subsequently, the kindergarten teachers were given more flexibility and greater freedom in terms of class organisation and teaching direction. They were also encouraged to get involved in the management of the kindergarten by sharing their thoughts with the head teachers.

Thirdly, kindergarten parents' attitudes and perspectives towards ECEC and child achievement also impacted on teachers' implementation and daily practices. The value of education has been reinforced in terms of personal development, social mobility, and national well being (Lee, 1996). A good education for a child is considered to be a good start for his/her life (Chen & Liu, 2000). According to some kindergarten teachers, the consistency of educational perceptions and the continuity of educational input from both kindergarten and home education can result in great differences of children, although kindergartens have been long regarded as the first place where children were socialised to build up a future foundation of children and to become part of the elite for their future education and work.

For most kindergarten teachers involved in this research, understanding and support received from upper levels (both national level and local level) and lower levels (mostly kindergartens) greatly influenced teachers behaviours and beliefs at the practical level where daily teaching and learning practice is shaped by policy understanding, translation, and implementation. Meanwhile, parental perceptions about children's achievement based on a broader social perspective

towards future success also impact on the teachers' daily practices. Nevertheless, the next part of the section is focusing on parental perceptions of ECEC and policy implementation in order to generate a holistic picture at the practical level.

6.3b Parental satisfaction with ECEC services

As more and more Chinese women enter the job market, the demand for public child care has increased. Currently, most Chinese parents are facing lengthy work schedules (more than eight hours per day) which greatly reduce the opportunity for family education. Under such circumstances, more and more Chinese parents cannot spend much time with their children; therefore, public child care sectors (i.e. kindergarten) have taken the major responsibility for child care while parents are working.

Moreover, the influence of the one child policy has largely changed Chinese parents' perspectives towards kindergarten education. On the one hand, the one child policy changed parental expectations of children's future success as 'the only children' become the only hope of the family (Fong, 2004). Under such circumstances, Chinese parents believe in 'winning at the first step of life' (Zhu, 2001) by engaging children with early involvement in education. On the other hand, the one child policy has changed the way that Chinese parents treat their children; it appears that Chinese parents try to provide the best available resources and give full attention to their children. In such respect, Chinese children have potential problems of being spoiled.

Consequently, child education provided by preschool sectors is expected to deal

with potential problems caused by the one child policy as well as to fulfil parental expectations of children's future success by providing stable foundations for future schooling. It was observed that most parents expect kindergarten to socialise their children by providing them opportunities to learn 'interaction' and to experience 'collective' lives. As previously discussed, Chinese single children are criticised as their characters are ruined by over-indulgent parents and other close family members whose attention and aspiration are focused on them. Thus, Chinese parents put great emphasis on kindergarten experiences through which to enhance children's social abilities as well as to prepare children for the future.

Moreover, kindergarten is understood not merely as the place to socialise young children, but also as the place to deal with only children's problems including being spoiled and self-centred. It was observed in this research that most parents placed great importance on finding out about their children's daily behaviours in the kindergarten. They wanted to know whether their children can get along with their peers, and if not, why they have problems with other children. For those parents, children's social abilities were more important than their academic achievement at this stage.

However, not every parent shared the same belief and perspectives towards kindergarten practices. Some parents in this research admitted that they had very complex perception towards kindergarten education. On the one hand, they understand 'play' is essential for young children at their early age but on the other hand, they are afraid that 'play' will divert their children from learning by taking up time which should be devoted to studying. According to some parents, in a competitive society like China, children have to work very hard both

academically and non-academically in order to gain future success. As a result, young children cannot spend too much time playing. Although high academic achievement is not required as early as kindergarten stage, children are still expected to have certain academic abilities in order to be better prepared for their formal schooling.

Moreover, parents are facing pressure in terms of children's future success due to the severe competition in Chinese society. Kindergartens, thus, face the pressure from parents to build up an essential foundation for future success by providing quality teaching and learning practices. Under such circumstances, the kindergarten teachers placed great emphasis on the children's academic achievement, even though it was not a requirement of the ECEC policy. According to those teachers, the academic enhancement in their daily practice was organised especially to meet parental expectations on children's kindergarten learning. In addition, some kindergarten teachers believed that parents emphasise the importance of academic achievement and often assessed children's learning achievement through measuring how many Chinese characters their children have learned or how well they can count. They, therefore, add extra learning activities regarding learning literacy and numeracy in daily practice.

Nevertheless, what teachers believe about parental thoughts was different from what parents actually think. It seemed that Chinese parents in this study put less emphasis on literacy and numeracy learning than teachers. Generally, they expressed their satisfaction towards kindergarten arrangement in terms of the curriculum, facilities and decoration. According to some parents, children's

happiness in kindergarten was their main concern. In particular, they believed that children should firstly feel comfortable and safe before they start to learn. Although parents understood that children are facing heavy pressure for future success, they still felt children should enjoy their kindergarten life, therefore pressure for academic excellence should not be put on their children at the kindergarten stage.

It was observed that parents had general information about the curriculum including the publisher and the five-area enhancement. No detailed information regarding content and methods, the requirement, or the learning feedback was required by parents. Most kindergarten parents believed that it was teachers' responsibility to understand the curriculum and to ensure its implementation. Thus, what parents want was just the learning outcomes of children. Although few parents admitted they have gone through the curriculum to better understand the concept and philosophy of teaching and learning at the kindergarten level. However, most kindergarten teachers try to avoid such parental involvement which, in their view, may interfere with their daily practice.

It was also found out in this research, that parents paid much attention to preparing children for formal schooling. However, what happens in the Chinese preschool settings was very different to the British system, for example, in the Chinese preschool curriculum, there is no requirement to assess children at age six before they enter the primary school. Moreover, preschool sectors are individually independent and it is not necessary for kindergartens to have links with local primary schools. Meanwhile, the curriculum used in kindergartens is very different from the one used in primary schools. As previously discussed, the

kindergarten curriculum used currently combines five-areas of development in a series of activities without dividing them into individual subjects. Different curriculum and teaching styles are used in primary schools. Under such circumstances, the preparation for transition from kindergarten to primary school is difficult. Parents, therefore, expected teachers to prepare children physically and psychologically rather than from a knowledge-based perspective.

6.3c Summary

In this part of chapter, practitioners' (teachers, head teachers, and parents) perceptions of ECEC practice and child achievement were discussed on the basis of contemporary changes in Chinese society brought about by the one child policy and economic reform. Chinese children are expected to be successful in both their school lives and future jobs. Kindergarten, therefore, becomes the place to enhance children's abilities and to enable them to win at the first stage of their formal education. Under such circumstances, Chinese parents have high expectations of kindergarten education. In turn, kindergarten teachers provide quality programmes of education and care for children. However, differences have been identified between parental expectations and teachers' understanding. Nevertheless, both parents and teachers are working towards creating the best learning outcomes for the children.

Conclusion

The present examination of ECEC implementation and practice suggests that the implementation of policy is not merely influenced by the policy level but also by the practical level (kindergarten and parents). On the one hand, ECEC policy

constituted by the upper level shaped kindergarten teachers' practice by regulating what they should do and what they should not do. Kindergarten teachers, follow the policy and regulation in order to meet policy level requirements. On the other hand, ECEC policy restricts kindergarten teachers' practice by using 'universal policy' within the country without considering differences in terms of the economic and social environments of different regions. As a result, there is a gap between the understanding of policy and its implementation. Kindergarten teachers have to adjust their practice in order to bridge the gap between policy and the actual situation.

Furthermore, parental expectations on children's achievement have affected kindergarten practitioners' perspectives and practice as well. As for kindergarten teachers, parental expectations and perspectives towards ECEC have resulted in major differences in implementing the ECEC policy. It appears that what teachers understand about parental perspectives is different from what parents actually believe. However, due to the lack of communication in the Chinese education system, teachers' practice is based on their own interpretation of parental needs.

A general discussion based on data collected from this empirical research has been presented in this chapter. This study and research findings will be further placed in a broader context in the following chapter. Thus, the following chapter critically engages with elements of the transformation of contemporary China and the extent to which policy and implementation are shaped.

Chapter 7 Positioning and Reconstructing Chinese ECEC

Introduction

A central argument examined in this study is the belief of Chinese society that the care and education of young children affects their life achievement, though there are still various critical issues regarding understandings and beliefs about ECEC which may be hindering the general implementation and practice of policy at the practical level. From the data analysed and discussed in the previous three chapters, a general picture of policy implementation in the Chinese preschool sector has been presented.

In this chapter, a critique orientated discussion related to key issues in implementation and practice is carried out. In so doing, the ECEC policy implementation at the practical level can be understood in line with Chinese perspectives on child achievement (within the cultural orientation) and how social concerns, economic development, and political transformation impact on ECEC.

Early childhood education in China: understandings and perspectives

The early childhood field has experienced a number of shifts in the understanding of child development in past decades (Copple, De Lisi, & Sigel, 1982; Bowman, 1993). In particular, it is worth mentioning the shift towards understanding the impact of cultural differences on child achievement (Bowman,

1993). It is observed in childhood research that cultural differences impact highly how children learn. This is because 'patterns of culture are extraordinarily persistent if these are laid down in childhood through structured interaction with the bearers of culture' (Slobin, 1990).

In the Chinese context, traditional cultural values have a strong impact on the ways people wish to educate their children. Such perspectives on child education clearly present the interdependence of culture and child education (Bowman, 1993). Throughout the whole learning process, Chinese children establish the type of teaching-learning relationship (Bowman, 1991) based on cultural understandings. Such particular cultural orientated perspectives on child education can be addressed with concerns of traditional Chinese cultural values and contemporary perceptions of early childhood education.

7.1 Constructing early childhood education within the Confucian influences

The concepts of child rearing and educating in China have evolved from traditional Chinese viewpoints into a combination of conventional and modern perspectives on child and childhood. Currently, Chinese perceptions towards the child, childhood, and child education are characterised as a mix of Chinese and Western cultures. Although these perceptions can be seen as a blend of East and West, Confucian influences on contemporary Chinese beliefs and practice of child education are still observed in Chinese society. Therefore, in this section, the discussion centres on ways and the extent to which Confucianism impacts on Chinese ECEC implementation at the practical level.

In Westerners' eyes, 'the life of the Chinese people is permeated with

Confucianism' (Fung, 1976, p.1). However, after having experienced deep cultural transformations, such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution, then the opening-up policy to the world, and the current capitalist orientated economic reform, Chinese people are not simply confined to Confucian values but are now being exposed to broader and various ways of thinking which shape their values and beliefs. Nevertheless, Confucian concerns of morality, collectivism, and harmony are still addressed in the current value orientation. Meanwhile Chinese ideologies which stemmed from Confucianism still influence the beliefs of the Chinese towards child rearing. In discussing the main Confucian values of child education, it is plausible to explain how Chinese culture and Confucian values can affect the development of children in contemporary China.

Firstly, the emphasis of early learning in Confucianism has dominated general Chinese perspectives of child learning. According to Confucius, as extensively discussed in Chapter 2, children should learn at very young age in order to be useful members of society when they grow up (Mao, 2002). In line with the Confucian argument, Chinese young children at the age of three or four must begin to engage with knowledge learning and to obtain abilities essential to understand wider social and moral obligations in the future. Kindergarten, therefore, has long been regarded as an important socialising organisation which tailors young children's early knowledge and learning experiences towards this aim.

According to Confucius, children can quickly pick up information and behaviours from their surroundings and thus quickly react to such surroundings (see Appendix 5: the story of Mencius' mother moves house three times, *孟母三迁*).

It is considered crucial for a child's development that he/she is educated in a positive learning atmosphere where child learning is regarded as a priority. Consequently, it is important for the kindergarten to build up or provide positive education inputs in order to obtain positive learning outcomes. As for Confucius, children's learning at an early stage is the process of imitation including imitation of behaviours and discourses (Mao, 2002). Thus, the earlier children start to learn, the easier or the quicker they will do so. Such understanding of child learning is widely accepted in Chinese society. Parents and early years educators engage with constructing a positive learning environment for young children at the early stage.

Secondly, Chinese children, especially boys, are expected to honour their families through being excellent both academically and at work (Zhou, 2004). In accordance with traditional Confucianism, Chinese male children should honour their families through gaining honourable positions in society (Zhou, 2004). If the child fails in society, not only he will lose face in front of his family, but the family will also lose face (Zhou, 2004).

However, the Chinese one child policy has restructured Chinese family life so that the status of female children in the family has changed. Although Chinese still see the male child as being more important and precious than the female child, currently Chinese female children have more opportunities to gain better education. Parents understand that the only child, regardless of gender, becomes the only hope for them to fulfil family obligations and the desired social mobility. As more and more female children have equal opportunities to be educated, the pressure on male children becomes higher. Unlike the past when

male children only needed to compete with fellow males, currently, they need to compete with both males and females. Under such circumstances, boys face more pressure in current society. Meanwhile, girls, unlike before, have more opportunities to live the lives of their choice. Girls, though, may have to work even harder in order to be competitive and to be successful in a male-dominated society.

Thirdly, Confucius arguments regarding parents' primary duty of education and care have long impacted on Chinese views of parental involvement in child education. It is the Chinese tradition to believe that it is the parents' fault if they do not educate their children (San Zi Jing, *子不教，父之过*). Parents, therefore, help teachers to shape young children to become independent and beneficial to society, respectful and obedient to parents and elders, and to be responsible, honest, and benevolent citizens (Mao, 2002).

Parents in contemporary China are also facing pressure. On the one hand, they have to work hard to support the family and children. Especially to support children due to the one child policy, the only child becomes the 'family treasure' attracting the most parental attention and high parental investment. On the other hand, the only child is the single hope of the family on whom parents can depend in old age. Thus, parents expect their children to be excellent in academia to gain future success. Parents make substantive efforts to ensure that children have a good foundation for future success through early involvement in education.

Fourthly, teachers, an essential component within Chinese preschool sectors,

also behave in accordance with Confucius concerns. Confucius defined a teachers' job as to teach moral values, pass on skills and knowledge, clear up confusion (*师者，传道，授业，解惑*), and finally to make sure every child learns consistently. Even kindergarten teachers are expected to shape children's behaviours and learning habits through strictly controlling them (Zhou, 2004). It appears that in the Chinese early childhood education context, the provision of strict teaching and learning activities is considered as important and essential.

Kindergarten education in contemporary China is working under such circumstances. It was observed that Chinese kindergarten sectors provide essential knowledge based and behaviour shaped teaching and learning activities in order to prepare children for formal schooling. In current kindergarten sectors, academic preparation for formal schooling is not the only requirement of kindergarten education. Children are expected to excel in five areas of development (i.e. health, language, science, society, and arts) as previously discussed in Chapter 1. Consequently, from a very young age Chinese children are educated through Chinese perspectives regarding discipline, collectivism, and achievement.

Fifthly, Confucianism emphasised the importance of harmonious and respectful teacher-child relationship which also influences Chinese early childhood education. Teachers, in traditional Chinese terms, are regarded as a child's second authority figure after the parents (Xian Sheng You Lai, 2004). Chinese children are taught at a very young age to respect their teachers and to obey them to obtain harmony in education settings; while, teachers should also 'love' their students. It is believed that such rapport in the relationship, (i.e. children

respect their teachers and teachers 'love' their students), enhances teaching and learning outcomes by creating a reciprocal atmosphere within the learning sector.

The discussion of Chinese early childhood education within Confucianism influences helps the understanding of how Chinese beliefs about the child and childhood are shaped. The following section moves to argue that Western perspectives of children, childhood, and child education cannot be applied to understand Chinese ECEC. A plausible alternative is that alongside an understanding of the cultural impact on child development, the implementation of ECEC at the practical level can be best interpreted.

7.2 Positioning early childhood education within traditional Chinese values and Western Influences

Chinese cultural values largely determined ways in which Chinese people cultivate their children. In Chinese culture, education has long been valued (Stevenson & Lee, 1990) as the 'ladder' for social mobility. Parents place great importance on children's pursuit of academic success (Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Children, therefore, from a very young age are educated with such view in mind. Chinese values of education influence the way they look at child education and development. To understand how Chinese cultural values affect early childhood education, a discussion of Chinese values together with a comparison of Western perspectives is discussed. In so doing, the relationship between culture and early years education (Chan, 2004) has been built up.

Before comparing Chinese early years education perspectives with Western theories, a detailed personal account of how my own experiences reflect a

cultural mix of East and West and how such experiences have helped me to understand that no single theory could provide a complete understanding of child education and development (Chan, 2004) will be presented. Only when combining an understanding of Chinese cultural values, can Western perspectives better explain the current ECEC situation in China from a practical stance.

Like mathematics, physics, and chemistry, English has long been regarded as an important medium linked to academic success by most Chinese. Therefore, both parents and school children tend to put great efforts in to improving English abilities. Under such circumstances, I chose English studies as my first degree. The degree in English not only equipped me with English communication abilities in both writing and speaking but also enabled me to think about going abroad for further study. As a result, in 2002 I started my overseas experiences.

On the one hand, studying in UK for more than 4 years enriched my life experiences. By experiencing different life styles, learning perspectives, and ways of thinking, my knowledge scope has been widened. On the other hand, my original Chinese-based perspectives towards the world have been restructured into a mix of Chinese and Western (largely British) ones. Such experience not only fulfils my personal transition in terms of way of thinking and way of doing things but also serves the purpose of academic and cultural exchange (Chan, 2004).

Indeed, due to my original Chinese-based perspectives, the first two years of overseas experiences have been a site of struggle and negotiation. It has been a struggle around culture and values as well as power and empowerment.

Through such struggle and negotiation, my original perspectives of the world are turned 'upside down' (Cannella, 2005), I am, therefore, trying to seek the 'otherwise' (Mac Naughton, 2005) on the basis of original interpretation. For example, affected by Confucianism or maybe because of having been taught from very young age, I deeply believed in the hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students. My understanding of such a hierarchical relationship affected my behaviour in the academic situation. I was uncertain about whether I could query 'why' or whether I could 'challenge' a view by raising different opinions. Nevertheless, such uncertainties were nothing other than the constant struggle to deconstruct my original shifts of understanding and construct new ways of thinking (i.e. being critical) and position myself as a researcher from a post modern perspective.

In fact, when exposed to Western knowledge I have been inevitably influenced by its way of thinking and the problematic nature of a single truth. Such exchange and enhancement of knowledge inspired me to explore Chinese early childhood education issues through a new perspective. While studying for my PhD about China in UK over the past 3 years, I have had more opportunities to step back to re-examine Chinese contexts. Surprisingly, by obtaining different viewpoints when re-examining, some of what I believed before has been challenged on my way of seeking for 'otherwise'. My practical experiences of personal transformations in terms of perspectives and values reflect an understanding that current Chinese social, economic, and political changes affect the goals and expectations for children's learning (Chan, 2004).

7.2a Chinese philosophical thinking of early years education

As discussed previously, Chinese traditional child developmental perspectives stemming from Confucianism have shaped the way the Chinese want to educate their children. However, this influence has become less dominant due to the constant changes of culture and people's the way of thinking (Chan, 2004) in the Chinese society where perspectives towards the child and child education have been affected by other issues, which includes economic changes, globalisation, and Western developmental theories. Thus, Western developmental theories and Chinese philosophies together with contemporary changes in Chinese society shape the Chinese early childhood education. Therefore, I will continue to engage in the discussion of both Chinese philosophies and Western theories to best understand and elucidate what I observed in the Chinese kindergartens in the current study and what effective preschool programmes mean for children's future development.

Taking into consideration the fundamental idea about a child, according to Confucianism, is that 'man, by nature, is good' (*人之初，性本善*, Xu, 1994, p.2). However, it is through different practice they become far apart (*性相近，习相远*, Xu, 1994, p.2). Eventually, Confucians, especially Mencius (*孟子*, 371-289 BC) believed in the original goodness of human nature (Chan, 1963). He, thus, believed the original nature of children as well as their innate knowledge and ability are good (Fung, 1976). Besides these good endowments of children, there are other elements, which are neither good nor bad, but which, if not duly controlled, can lead to evil or failure (Chan, 2004). Under such circumstances, only through teaching and learning can children strengthen their good innate

capacities and weaken the external influences of being evil or fail. In his developmental philosophy, Mencius emphasised both nature and nurture (Chan, 2004) of a child which is involved in the pursuit of future goodness. For Mencius, children's learning is highly determined by parental guidance because of the inability of children to concentrate on study and to learn diligently.

Another influential philosopher in determining child education was Sun Tzu (孙子 298-238 BC). Unlike Mencius' conception of original goodness of human nature, Sun Tzu, thus, stressed that a child was born with evil as well as intelligence. According to Sun Tzu, human nature is endowed with envy, hatred, and greed (Chan, 2004). Only through constant cultivation and efforts can human beings acquire goodness. Based on his understanding of human nature, Sun Tzu continued to argue the importance of external control (Chai, 1975) through cultivation and experiences in order to pursue goodness and refine the personality. Similar to Mencius' developmental theories, Sun Tzu also emphasised the importance of nature and nurture in terms of child development. Although children are believed to be born with evil, their innate intelligence enables them to channel and control their evil endowments through learning (Chai, 1975). Therefore, his argument helps us to understand why, in China, educators and schools take the responsibility to regulate children's behaviours. Meanwhile, it also helps to explain why the curriculum is designed to provide educative experiences to cultivate children's minds (Chan, 2004).

Although there is main difference around the debate regarding basic human nature, evil or good, both Mencius and Sun Tzu emphasised the importance of education and learning for pursuing goodness including humanity, righteousness,

propriety, and wisdom (main principles of Confucianism) and refining personal nature. According to Mencius, appropriate educational guidance by both educators and parents can help children to strengthen their knowledge and ability. While for Sun Tzu, regulations and rules can help to shape and control children, thus, to achieve the refinement of personalities.

Besides Confucianism, the Legalism (*法家*) advocated by Han Fei (*韩非子*, ?-233 BC) also influences Chinese perspectives towards the development of children. Inspired by his teacher Sun Tzu, Han Fei also believed that children were born with evil. However, he promoted the idea of rewards and punishment (Chan, 2004) in order to restrict human behaviours and deter them from evil thoughts. In Han Fei's conception of education, he emphasised the importance of rewards and punishment in shaping a child's behaviour (Chan, 2004) which is very similar to the behavioural approach to education which promotes learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour due to experience (Benson, 2004). For Han Fei, strict penalties and rewards can reinforce children's behaviour, eventually, achieve social stable and order. His ideas towards shaping children's behaviours help to understand why schools are expected to be the place with appropriate environment to enhance children's behaviour.

In reviewing the main doctrines of both Confucianism and Legalism, the emphases on learning can easily be understood. Learning for them is considered as a crucial factor for children's future success. Therefore, these concrete beliefs about learning have long affected Chinese perceptions and expectations of children as well as their own behaviours. In Chinese culture, parents are expected to make constant efforts for their children in order to

reassure their future success. In a previous section, the story of 'Mencius' Mother Moves Houses Three Times' exemplified the great effort into moulding her child's diligent character and habits (Xu, 1994, p. 6). The story has also affected parenting practice and inspired most Chinese parents to constantly dedicate themselves to their children's learning. Children, in turn, are expected to study hard and to succeed so as to reward parental efforts and love.

It is clear that traditional cultural values of parenting and child learning affect Chinese parenting styles. However, the extent to which cultural values have impacted parental practice is still unclear. Due to changes in time, society, even people's cultural values, parental expectations have become different. In the traditional story, concern mainly focused on the child moral development. Presently, most parents in contemporary China focus more on developing children's creativity, self expression, competitive capacity, social ability, and academic performance. Such shifts in perceptions are not only due to social changes in modern China, in terms of family structure, but also relate to globalisation, enabling Chinese children to experience a new type of childhood.

Moreover, traditionally there were clear standards or patterns of child education (understood as Confucian influenced standards). In modern China, the standard of child rearing and development can be very different either from traditional values or from Western perspectives. As previously argued, even in contemporary China parents adopt an 'authoritative' (Baumrind, 1967) parenting style, which reflects a responsive involvement with children regarding learning and developing. This parenting style is more or less the same as the traditional one. However, nowadays parents adopt a more complicated parenting style. It is

believed that the stance that parents adopt to bring up a child and promote learning affects their own understanding of child education and their parenting practices.

The nature of children is perceived very differently by traditional Chinese philosophical understanding. However, the central argument of these Chinese philosophers is that children's nature and personalities can be nurtured accordingly disregarding their original nature (either evil or good). According to John Locke's (1632-1704) idea, a child is a blank slate on which experiences make imprints (Berk, 1997; Meece, 2002). In this respect, a quality ECEC programme could impact on a child's physical, mental, and social development in his/her early years of life (Young, 2002). Such understanding of ECEC has reflected to Chinese early years education system and perceptions towards the effectiveness of ECEC programme.

7.2b Chinese perspectives of early years education in a broader context

In the previous sections, Chinese ancient philosophers' viewpoints about the child and early childhood education were introduced. As argued, traditional Chinese cultural values largely shape Chinese people's way of thinking and their way of cultivating their children. However, as time changes, the dominant cultural values in terms of beliefs, customs, and skills (Chan, 2004) of a society might also change. Thus, it is plausible to understand that modern Chinese perspectives about the child, childhood, even child education have also changed due to the broader changes in Chinese society (social, economic, and political transformation as previously discussed). In order to better understand Chinese

perspectives on ECEC, this part of chapter discusses Western understanding of quality ECEC programmes by combining and comparing with Chinese viewpoints of child education. In so doing, it aims to reveal how Chinese build up their own early childhood education on the basis of both Chinese traditional values and Western perspectives.

Van der Gaag (2002, 2004) argued that early interventions of a child have multiple benefits including the all-round development and increased possibility of progressing to higher levels of education. Over the long term, the child benefits from the early education experience to better and more schooling which makes him/her more 'successful' as an adult (Van der Gaag, 2002). In this respect, a child can be a 'successful' adult through appropriate education (Meece, 2002; Van der Gaag, 2002). This view of the early years education is very similar to Mencius' doctrine which emphasises the great role of education in children's development.

As we understand, Chinese parents always make constant efforts to ensure children's future success. However, it is important to notice that the definition of success differs from country to country. As for most Chinese parents, the future success of a child means a better job with higher income. Thus, education is understood as the common solution to improve children so as to gain chances for future job success. Under such circumstances, parents usually rely on schools to provide positive inputs for children to foster their future success. Schools, therefore, organise relevant tasks or build up an appropriate learning environment in order to meet parents' goals and expectations. In particular, the appropriate learning environment is observed vital for a child's development.

Environment is understood as a significant stimulus which influences a child's development. This idea is accepted and put into practice in Chinese kindergarten sectors which can be observed in this research. As presented in Chapter 4, the kindergartens are nicely decorated to make children to feel comfortable.

In addition, John Dewey's (1859-1952) educational ideas influenced the development of Chinese early childhood education. During his visits between 1919 and 1920, he made his major educational contribution – he introduced child-centred education to Chinese educators. Dewey believed that it is important to pay attention to children's interest, capacities, real-life experiences, and interaction throughout educational process. Dewey's educational philosophy enabled Chinese people to rethink their way of cultivating children. Traditionally, Chinese people emphasised the important role of teachers in the teaching and learning process. Teachers, as the centre of education, determined ways or methods to transmit knowledge. This situation has changed in current educational contexts. The child-centred educational philosophy has been widely accepted which was observed in this study where children are actively integrated into different teaching and learning processes.

However, as observed in this study, Chinese people have developed their own interpretation of the child-centred educational perspective. In this study, it was observed that children are expected to sit quietly and pay close attention to what teachers say in the classroom. The main reason for this can be related to Chinese cultural values of social order and the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students. As explained in Chapter 2, the Confucian notion of

'letting the ruler a ruler, the father a father, the son a son' (*让统治者统治者，父亲的父亲，儿子的儿子*) (King & Bong, 1985) can be applied to understand why Chinese children are expected to behave accordingly in the classroom. Bearing in mind this Confucian notion, children need to behave like students do at schools. Furthermore, children are expected to respect their teachers and their authority without question. In the kindergarten context, respecting teachers can be interpreted as listening to them, following their instructions, and remaining on task.

In addition, Chinese perspectives towards 'learning through play' are also distinct Chinese ECEC. Play is understood as the most frequent form of behaviour among preschool children (Berk, 1997). In line with this argument, Western child development psychologists believe that if children are provided with props and encouraged to play, it can bring their cognitive and educational benefits (Chan, 2004). However, traditional Chinese values towards 'play' have affected teachers' inclination to offer play (Chan, 2004) in teaching and learning activities. It is Chinese tradition to believe 'diligence brings with it achievement but play brings no benefit for us' (Xu, 1994, p.188). Influenced by this notion, some Chinese parents and teachers feel negative towards 'learning through play' despite the emphasis of 'learning through play' having been promoted by Chinese education authorities. Such negative perceptions towards play can explain why, in this research, children have fewer opportunities to carry out activities as they wish.

Conclusion

In this part of the chapter, the discussion of the data adopted the format of a critique. I firstly explained how my personal transformation from a pure Chinese cultural orientated perspective into a mix of Chinese and Western values has provided me opportunities to step back from the Chinese system and to look beneath its skin. Such self-reflexive endeavour enables both, my voice and that of others who are involved in the policy implementation processes. In this respect, my thoughts, at some moments, might critically affiliate with Chinese ways of thinking and at other times may critically contravene them by affiliating with Western ways of thinking. Therefore, Peters & Burbules' (2004, p.57) acknowledgement of Foucauldian perspective that 'situates the act of educational research and choices of theory and methodology as themselves implicated in the power/knowledge nexus' could best explain my attempts when dealing with my data.

I further positioned Chinese preschool education into traditional culture discourse where Confucianism is embedded in shaping ways of thinking and understandings of child education. It is argued that the ideologies of child education in contemporary China have been changed due to broader transformations in society, however, without considering cultural effects (in this study Confucian influences) on the education context, only an incomplete understanding of Chinese early childhood education will be gained. By reviewing Confucian doctrines, I gradually built up a discourse of perspectives where Chinese preschool education is positioned and constituted. In so doing, I associate Confucian perspectives of child education with contemporary

arguments in Chinese early childhood education field so as to make sense of how traditional Confucianism affects people in a general way.

Another discourse which I identified in this chapter was a multiple and dialogical combination of Chinese perspectives and Western theories when understanding my research data. As argued earlier, Chinese perspectives towards child education is not merely affected by Confucianism but is shaped by broader contexts, which include current drastic social, economic, and political transformation and globalisation. In that sense, I reviewed various perspectives and theories in both Chinese and Western contexts in order to illustrate how Chinese early childhood education has been shaped and distinct from others in other contexts. By comparing and combining Chinese perspectives with Western theories, I explained to what extent both Chinese and Western perspectives and theories have influenced Chinese parents' understanding of child cultivation and kindergarten practitioners' beliefs on policy implementation and practice. Meanwhile, combining the emerging argument of ECEC field with my research data has led to an understanding of the Chinese stance on how children should be educated and how such understanding of child rearing should be put into practice in kindergarten education. I, thus, conclude that an understanding of Chinese culture and people's perspectives can enable us to make sense of the current implementation of ECEC policy and practice at the practical level.

Conclusion

Introduction

The focus of this study has been the investigation into early childhood education in contemporary China. It has firstly examined how Chinese early years policy is constructed, translated, and implemented at the practical level. It further incorporated practitioners' (head teachers and teachers) daily practice in examining how their understandings, beliefs, and attitudes towards early years education can affect their understanding of policy and hence, daily practice. In that sense, the investigation into policy implementation and practitioners' perspectives was accomplished from a 'bottom-up' approach.

In order to build up a broader perspective of child education and care, both Chinese and Western ECEC contexts were firstly reviewed. This attempted to position child education and care in the discourse of quality. It aimed to make sense of the extent to which ECEC has been perceived as one of the major factors that enhance the subsequent academic performance of young children (Dahlberg, *et al.,* 1999). In reviewing the literature, the understanding of the demands of non-parental care, due to women joining men in the labour market in Chinese society has been gradually built up. Such demands of non-parental care in China have underpinned the development of Chinese ECEC over the past two decades. It is apparent from this review that early childhood education has been put on the Chinese government's agenda, in order to ensure children's achievement through early intervention and securing female participation in the

workforce.

While reviewing the literature in the field of early childhood education, I further built up my personal stance which inspired me to carry out the current research. Nevertheless, this essential rationale enabled me to position myself in the research design and to construct the framework through integrating theories, personal experiences, and the real situation in the field. There were many circumstances that helped to construct this research. Firstly, my personal experience on shifting paradigms to study ECEC has given me the opportunity to examine the Chinese preschool system from a different research viewpoint. I have adopted an insider-out position when beginning to question Chinese child education and care. On the one hand, I have felt excited to experience a contrasting early years type of practice (i.e. learning through play) and felt empowered when thinking about adopting such practice into Chinese preschool settings. On the other hand, I have felt less powerful when I realised that adopting a new practice in Chinese preschool settings was not as simple as I thought. Issues deeply embedded in Chinese preschool education were identified in order to understand why the Chinese system has its own practices. Secondly, Chinese early years education has experienced both internal and external challenges. I believe that trying to understand both internal and external changes contributed to explaining how child education and care perspectives have been transformed in China over the past two decades. Thirdly, although the importance of early intervention to a child's subsequent development has long been acknowledged in the Chinese context, the relatively low status of ECEC compared with other levels of schooling is perceived throughout this research.

Less research regarding ECEC policy implementation at practical levels has been carried out and this study was a step to redress the imbalance. These circumstances have positioned my research in one way or another.

This study has been constructed on the basis of building up a broader background where both Chinese and Western theories underpinning ECEC are integrated and position this research in certain circumstances which integrated my personal experiences with issues relating to ECEC in the Chinese context. Moreover, the theoretical framework in relation to social change and quality of education and care has been acknowledged in order to underpin the research. One of those frameworks was embedded in the discussion in relation to how Confucianism has been working to shape Chinese people's ways of thinking and ways of cultivating their children. Furthermore, how social, economic, and political transformation has affected traditional Chinese cultural values towards the child, childhood, and early childhood education has been revisited. Another framework has been shaped by the understanding of 'quality' (Dahlberg, *et al.,* 1999) in child education discourse, which has been influenced by adopting post-modern views through my readings and writings during the time used in this research.

In this chapter I conclude the study on the basis of the research background, the rationale, the theoretical framework, and research findings while combining my own form of knowing and researching. One way to start is by discussing the links between the methodology, the limitations, and the findings, whilst remaining aware of the research questions previously identified in the Introduction chapter. Then a further discussion related to the implications and suggestions for more

research into this important, yet under researched area, are also included in this chapter.

Reviewing the research methodology: a post research account

This study was conducted using a multiple case study approach which included both qualitative and quantitative investigation to portray how ECEC policy has been translated into daily practice and to obtain the perceptions of practitioners (head teachers, teachers, and parents) towards ECEC for children aged 3 to 6 in Chinese contexts. The adoption of a multiple case study approach was due to the concern of avoiding bias and providing a complete triangulation of the study. In that sense, four different data collection methods were employed including the documentation which aimed at reviewing and analysing official policy; questionnaire survey (mostly close ended) for practitioners (head teachers, teachers, and parents) to collect general information about their perceptions and understandings; unstructured observations of classes and activities; and semi-structured interviews of head teachers, teachers, and parents. The use of observations and interviews also focused on comparing what respondents said they have done by comparing against what they were actually doing in their daily practice.

The use of a multiple case study approach together with different data collection methods in this study had several significant advantages. It presented a complete and comprehensive picture of each case study kindergarten. Firstly, the documentation and questionnaire survey provided key data for this study by revealing general information related to kindergarten management, curriculum

organisation, and general perspectives towards early years education and child development. Secondly, observations and interviews served the purpose of both triangulations and reflexivity. Two-stage observations were conducted in each term to look at classroom activities and interactions between teachers and children. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were carried out after the first round of observations has done and before the second round of observations which aimed to seek for perception and understanding. The reason for this procedure was to examine what was observed from the first round of observations then using the second round of observations to reflect on what the respondents said in the interviews. In so doing, the multiple case study approach provided sufficient sources of data collected from each case study kindergarten.

Throughout the empirical research, the role of the researcher while conducting the research, the ethical issues regarding doing research with young children, and the cultural concerns hindering the research have been taken into consideration so as to enhance the validity of the results. First, the role of the researcher mainly related to the stance or the viewpoint the researcher adopted when designing and conducting the research. The stance the researcher took could highly influence the way of conducting the research and the way of understanding the data. Therefore, an insider-out status allowed fresh understanding of the Chinese education system. Being a Chinese researcher in the British education system also allowed me to examine Chinese preschool education through a Western theory orientated methodology. In this sense, I 'released' myself from original ways of thinking (mainly Chinese cultural orientated perspectives) and adopted a more critically orientated approach to

understand so as to avoid personal subjectivity when doing the research.

Second, full attention was given to the ethical issues in this research. Before working with each kindergarten, a detailed outline of the research and what information was to be collected were explained to each participant. Due to the involvement of young children, the field work did not start until permission had been given by parents. Finally, this research was designed and conducted on the basis of Western styles; it inevitably would encounter the differences of culture between Chinese and Western. Cultural concerns, therefore, were also taken into consideration in order to decrease the influence of cultural differences. Therefore, differences in terms of class/kindergarten size, teacher and children ratio, facilities, teachers' role, curriculum, and so forth were identified between Chinese and Western (mainly UK) kindergartens. Those differences on the basis of contextual and cultural discourses have differentiated Chinese early years education from Western ones. Moreover, Chinese cultural values towards the positive impression (losing or saving face) also determined the ways of conducting the research therefore led to the ways of interpreting the data.

Once the data collection has finished, the collected interview data and open ended questionnaire data were transcribed and typed up while waiting for further action. In order to organise the data into manageable pieces, the data was firstly numbered by lines and counted once by every five lines. Then the numbered data was gone through line by line so as to identify topics on the basis of Dahlberg *et al.'s* (1999) argument of quality. Once the data was gone through, it then organised into a file containing Line No, Topics, Text/Highlight, Translations, and Comments (see Chapter 3). The organised and shortened data was brought

together for further scrutiny based on the pre-determined analysis framework as defined in Chapter 3.

To sum up, together with multiple methods of data collection, this multiple case study enabled the researcher to investigate the implementation of Chinese ECEC policy at the practical level while gaining insights of practitioners' perceptions towards ECEC. A detailed view towards implementation and practice in Chinese preschool sectors has been built up. In addition, by adopting postmodern perspectives to look at the data, issues related to cultural values embedded in Chinese society as well how those cultural issues impacted on the implementation and practice in Chinese preschool settings were clarified and concluded for the study.

Reflecting on the limitations of the study

This study was designed to respond to perceived shortage of empirical research on early years education in Chinese context. However, due to the constraints of research time limit and personal funding, intercultural study, and small scale perspective, there are certain limitations inevitably embedded in the research design. In this respect, I will identify relevant issues in the following sections to serve a self reflexive or self purpose for the final conclusions. Subsequently, in the following sections, I will look at my research framework, research design, and analytical framework separately in order to discuss the perceived limitations.

Reflecting on the research framework

In this research the concerns of theoretical framework was firstly based on the

understanding of Chinese culture with Confucianism influences and current social, economic, and political transformation and changes impacted on Chinese people's perspectives and beliefs. Then it further discussed such cultural values and social transformation embedded in a society like China, how child education has been perceived and how these perceptions have impacted on practice. Finally, I integrated Dahlberg *et al.*'s (1999) argument of quality in the theoretical framework in order to evaluate Chinese preschool sectors in the data analysing stage. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that the framework previously designed would have worked better if I had included a detailed discussion of cultural concerns of educational quality. As understood, the cultural values of both China and the West have a considerable impact on the researcher. Thus, together with the concerns from both cultures, analysing and understanding the research data can be presented in a better perspective. Consequently, the awareness of this claim will receive more attention in the future research design and data analysis.

Reflecting on the research design

Besides the potential modification of theoretical framework, certain concerns in terms of research design, including the sampling strategies and the conduction of the field work are identified. As presented in Chapter 3, this research was conducted in the Jiangxi province. The reason for involving one province was due to the concern of efficacy of time and resources when doing the research. However, comparing the findings against the Chinese situation (diversity and differences), the involvement of only one province could only reflect the situation of this particular setting while presenting only common parameters of the Chinese context. Being aware of potential limits of representativeness of

Chinese preschool system, this research has only drawn on the view of Jiangxi province to present what is happening in this region. Subsequently, the attempt to reflect instead of generalising the specific policy and implementation in Jiangxi province to the general perspective in the broader context of China is carried out for the conclusion.

The conduct of the field work reflected the Chinese cultural values of 'face' (面子) which is acknowledged as another limitation of this study. Owing to the cultural values towards face 'losing and saving', there were certain kindergartens I approached which declined my access. Therefore, the final four kindergartens involved in this study were approached through personal connections which enabled me to conduct the investigation. However, the classes observed were mostly selected through the kindergartens' own arrangement instead of being randomly chosen. Consequently, there is a risk to the reliability and validity of the research data.

Reflecting on the analytical framework used in the research and its implications

In this research, the analytical framework was mainly on the basis of Chinese cultural values and Dahlberg *et al.*'s (1999) concerns about quality. As earlier explained, this research was undertaken with reference to Western ways of conducting research. Inevitably, the analytical framework developed for the data analysis and interpretation was also drawn from Western perspectives. In that sense, the whole interpretation of data was carried out using a Western perspective of education quality. Nevertheless, the nature of the analysis itself had limitations which mainly relate to cultural differences.

The *raison d'etre* of this research was in response to the shortage of empirical research regarding ECEC policy and its implementation at the practical level. It is understood that there has been a lack of relevant theoretical knowledge in the Chinese educational research field which could be used as a guide to understand current implementation and practices. Under such circumstances, a Western theory was adopted which was perceived as one of the limitations in this research. However, combining the concerns of Chinese cultural values the analytical framework has been adjusted in order to deconstruct the purely Western theory orientated framework.

Concluding the study and re-visiting the research questions

On the basis of previous discussion of the research data, the research findings could be concluded so as to answer the research questions presented in the introduction chapter. Subsequently, in the following sections the research questions of 1) what contextual factors have shaped Chinese ECEC policy; 2) what factors have influenced the implementation of policy at the practical level in Jiangxi province; and 3) what are the general attitudes and perceptions towards policy implementation at the practical level particularly in Jiangxi province will be answered one by one.

What contextual factors have shaped Chinese ECEC policy?

The findings in this study demonstrate that the ECEC policy and its implementation at the practical level is shaped, not only by internal factors regarding traditional perspectives towards the child and childhood, and

contemporary cultural, social, economic, and political transformation which have brought new concepts towards ECEC but also by external factors including globalisation and international communications. This has enabled Western values regarding the child and childhood to influence the Chinese perspectives.

By reviewing traditional Chinese cultural values, it was found that the concerns for child education and development has long been emphasised. It is a Chinese tradition to believe that, by nature, children are born without differences and it is through educational input they become distinct from each other and become very different. In this sense, education has been perceived as the major tool to realise personal perfection and social mobility. Attached to the value of education, Chinese people regard being educated as the fundamental aspect in the acquisition of social prestige (Zhu, 2002). This fundamental understanding of education still impacts on Chinese beliefs in contemporary China. Meanwhile, the current social, cultural, economic, and political transformation has strengthened the importance of education for a child. Changes in Chinese society have enabled people to rethink education not only as a tool for personal perfection and social mobility but also as a means to remain competitive in a society such as China where success is highly valued. A good education, hence, can be relevant in utilising self potential and achieving economic interests. Nevertheless, early childhood education seems to be fundamental to underpin all such future achievements.

Moreover, globalisation and the Chinese opening-up policy also impact on understandings of the child, childhood, and child development. As observed in Chinese society, the young generation is currently experiencing a new type of

childhood with largely Western influences. Nowadays, Chinese young children not only have opportunities to experience Western life styles with fast food choices and internet communications but also connect with Western cultures through literature or video communications; for example the influences of Disney culture and most recently the 'Harry Potter fever'.

However, Chinese child rearing perspectives are still valid for bringing up the young generation. Combining with Western values towards the child and child education, the Chinese early years education tries to build up a perspective in which children are put in the centre and prepared for future schooling. While parents' lives rotate around their children's upbringing, they are regarded as 'customers' who can influence kindergarten education by freely exercising choice and actively engaging with children's learning. Kindergartens, both the private and state owned, in turn, provide relevant 'services' to meet parental expectations. In addition, the local educational authorities work as a medium to connect each individual kindergarten with the national government. This is to closely supervise each type of provision to ensure they meet the general requirements. Finally, the provincial policy level generally supervises each provision including the local level and the individual sector.

What factors have influenced the implementation of policy at the practical level in Jiangxi province?

As discussed in the previous three chapters, the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical level has been perceived as a site of struggle between the policy and the reality as well as the 'take for granted' needs and the actual needs. On one hand, the current ECEC policy shapes the structure of implementation at the

practical levels. By constituting relevant regulations and guidance, the policy makers try to generally supervise each individual kindergarten's ways of working with young children. However, it is the responsibility of each kindergarten to interpret and understand the policy and further to translate it into daily practices. It was found in this research that there was seldom official guidance for kindergarten teachers to follow when preparing daily teaching and learning activities. It was also found that the kindergartens were the major sector which provided training programmes to teachers. There were no standards to evaluate the appropriateness of in-service training programmes either at national or at local levels. In this respect, it was totally up to the kindergarten to provide training to their teachers, while, the planning of in service training programmes available for teachers largely depended on each kindergarten's financial situation.

On the other hand, the current ECEC policy restricted the practice of teachers at the practical levels. As discussed in Chapter 6, China has adopted a centre-periphery policy development system (Ma *et al.*, 2006). The kindergartens eventually had to follow the national policy regardless of which area they were situated. It is apparent that the current policy is constituted without taking into account the economic and social environment of each province. This varies significantly from south to north and east to west and rural to urban. Under such circumstances, the kindergarten teachers had to adjust their practice in order to implement the policy. Sometimes, they had to struggle between the policy and the reality in order to seek a balanced standpoint.

Additionally, the one way or 'top-down' communication style between policy level

and the practical level has also affected the implementation of the policy. As presented in Chapter 4, the general feedback from both teachers and parents was drawn to concerns of communication, as well as understanding of real needs. The kindergarten teachers in this research wanted the upper levels to really listen to their needs and their perspectives so that they can improve the implementation of the policy. They all felt that the current communication style put them in a difficult situation. They also called for more practical training programmes to help them to understand the policy scope so that they can understand how to translate the policy into practice. Parents wanted to have effective communication with teachers in order to monitor their children's learning and development.

What are the general attitudes and perceptions towards policy implementation at the practical level particularly in Jiangxi province?

The data presented in Chapter 5 represented the general attitudes and perceptions at the practical level where current ECEC policy was perceived and translated into daily practice. It was found that despite the differences between private and state kindergartens, striking similarities in terms of the perceptions towards curriculum organisation, teachers' responsibility, children's daily activities, parental involvement, and monitoring children' achievement were observed. This could be attributed to the fact that the vast majority of the issues addressed at the practical level are universal rather than specific and these stem from general perceptions of policy making and implementation in the Chinese context.

Generally, the implementation of ECEC policy at the practical levels (i.e. private or public) can be understood through discussions of issues related to teachers' training, curriculum arrangement, parental involvement, achievement monitoring, and formal schooling transition. Firstly, the issue of teachers' training closely related to how well the kindergarten teachers taught. Regarding the feedback that teachers provided as described in Chapter 5, the need for more in service training programmes was highlighted by most teachers, especially teachers from the private settings. It was apparent that the private kindergarten provided limited in-service training due to the financial constraints. However, for public kindergarten teachers the in-service training programmes received may have failed to meet their actual needs. In that sense, both private and public kindergarten teachers expressed the need to receive more relevant in-service training.

Secondly, the findings of this study presented a clear picture of the curriculum arrangement in both private and public kindergarten. It was observed that the curriculum arrangement in the kindergartens generally consisted of basic curriculum arrangement and special arrangement. The term basic curriculum arrangement means the teaching and learning activities organised on the basis of curriculum guidance where every kindergarten had the same activities. The special arrangement was developed by each individual kindergarten to promote the special features and hence to attract parents. It was apparent that the special arrangement varied from kindergarten to kindergarten in which a special emphasis is promoted, for example, some kindergartens promoted artistic programmes as their speciality; while other kindergartens may use physical

activities to enhance their competitiveness.

Thirdly, it was apparent in this study that despite their administrative feature, the kindergartens always involved parents into children's learning. To involve parents, each kindergarten in this study organised different activities, for example parents' day, for parents to understand what the kindergarten did for the young children. Parents, in turn, gave positive feedback about the arrangement and expressed their willingness to participate. It was also observed that parents' involvement in children's daily kindergarten lives allows them to monitor their children's learning.

Finally, the preparation for formal schooling at the kindergarten stage was perceived as physical and chronological process. Owing to the fact that most kindergartens do not have direct connections with local primary schools, the transition to the primary schools takes a different path in the Chinese context. What teachers normally do is to familiarise children with the basic requirements of primary schools, for instance each session of the primary school is 40 minutes when children are required to sit quietly and to listen to the teacher. Subsequently, for most kindergarten teachers and parents, a psychological readiness is more important than a knowledge readiness.

Further avenues and potential studies emerging from the research

The completion of this study does not necessarily mean ending the research on ECEC. On the contrary, conducting this research has created a new ground to examine the Chinese early years education sector. Thus, as a researcher who has certain knowledge of early years education in Chinese contexts, I would like

to suggest possible areas for further studies on the basis of the findings of current research.

Firstly, there could be further research into children's achievement in the first year of primary education to investigate whether kindergarten programmes do enhance children's achievement and the effects, if any, for their further schoolings. The data presented in this study offers some insight into what kindergarten teachers and parents believe about kindergarten education in relation to future achievement. Yet, there is no research evidence to support such an argument in the Chinese context. A longitudinal study from the first year of kindergarten life to the first year of primary education could well build evidence.

Secondly, as stated in this research, there is no systematic evaluation system for children before they enter primary education. Yet, I believe there is a need to investigate whether an assessment system is necessary for children at the kindergarten stage, as well as whether such an assessment system could enhance kindergarten teachers' understanding and performance while also benefiting primary school teachers. Such an investigation could probably offer suggestions to policy makers in terms of the ongoing preschool reforms.

Finally, there is also the potential for carrying out comparative research comparing the Chinese context with other countries. Due to globalisation and entering WTO, Chinese kindergarten education is no longer a domestic matter which can be enhanced through international communications. Thus, a comparative study of early years education could critically examine the system by comparing it with other system (i.e. British Foundation Stage).

Doing ECEC research in China: a personal reflection and enhancement process

By conducting this research, I not only obtained first hand knowledge about the reality of ECEC regarding policy constructions, understating, interpretations, and its implementation into daily practice in the Chinese context, but most importantly the enhancement of my personal abilities in terms of academic insight and research skills gained. Doing research overseas proved to be a challenging personal experience for a single Chinese female researcher, although at some stages of the study, I considered giving up due to endless difficulties encountered. I mostly struggled with my own attitudes and rational thoughts to find solutions and to solve issues encountered, especially those to re-construct knowledge in a Western research environment. However, I gradually became stronger and learned from frustration and failure to complete this research. The knowledge gained in this process constitutes my contribution to my country and ECEC field in China. In so doing, I was able to access, with both inside-out and outside-in perspectives, the reality of Chinese kindergartens. I acknowledge the contribution of teachers, head teachers and parents whose data have given shape to this research. Their daily practice and reality have been theorised beyond the official discourse of policy. Ultimately, it is their voice which needs to be heard to improve the policy process and the quality of the provision and my research study is an attempt in this direction.

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APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1.1

Consent Letter to Head Teachers (English)

04 February 2005
Preschool Head Teachers
Jiangxi Province
RE: The China Preschool Policy to Practice Context Project

Dear _____ Head teacher,

I am conducting research on current changing early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy to practice context in China. The study will focus on describing and analysing the main characteristics of the ECEC policy to practice context in the contemporary China. An in-depth analysis of current policy (at the macro level) as interpreted and implemented in local practice (at the micro level) will be undertaken. In such respect, the letter which is sent to you aims to seek for your permission of conducting the research within your kindergarten which including teachers and children.

I am in the process of collecting general data to be used in the study which including documents collection, questionnaire survey, observation, and interview. It would be grateful if you and your kindergarten could participate in my research. All information provided will be used only for research purposes and no names or identification will be disclosed. If you agree to participate in this research, please fill in your surname and send this letter back to me. I have enclosed an addressed envelope with stamps for your convenience which can be return to me before the start of this research.

Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Faithfully

Lu Bai

APPENDIX 1.2

Consent Letter to Head Teachers (Chinese)

2005-04-19

幼儿园院长

江西省

RE：关于对当今中国学前教育政策和实践的研究

亲爱的_____院长：

您好，本人正在进行一项对当今中国早期幼儿教育政策和实践的研究。这个研究着眼于描述和分析当前中国早期幼儿教育的主要特点并且对当今幼儿教育政策（宏观方面）是如何被理解和运用到幼儿园实践工作（微观方面）中的过程做了详细的说明和阐述。因此，这封介绍信旨在介绍我的研究方法以及征求关于您和您的幼儿园参与到我的研究中的意见。目前，这项研究到了收集和分析相关资料的阶段，其中包括相关资料收集，问卷调查，课堂观察，以及访谈。因此，您的参与将有助于这项研究的进程并且为这项研究提供宝贵的意见。所有资料将仅用于研究需要，您的任何信息及想法将不会公开并且得到全面的保护。如果您愿意参与到这项研究中请在信的开头填上您的姓名并寄还给我，如有任何问题请致电13317912100 与本人联系。

谢谢您的合作！

致

敬礼

APPENDIX 1.3

Consent Letter to Teachers (English)

04 February 2005
Preschool Teachers
Jiangxi Province

RE: The China Preschool Policy to Practice Context Project

Dear _____ Teacher,

I am conducting research on current changing early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy to practice context in China. The study will focus on describing and analysing the main characteristics of the ECEC policy to practice context in the contemporary China. An in-depth analysis of current policy (at the macro level) as interpreted and implemented in local practice (at the micro level) will be undertaken. In such respect, the letter which is sent to you will be seeking for your permission of participating in this research.

I am in the process of collecting general data to be used in the study which including documents collection, questionnaire survey, observation, and interview. It would be grateful if you could participate in my research. All information you provided will be used only for research purposes and no names or identification will be disclosed. If you agree to participate in this research, please fill in your surname and send this letter back to me.

I have enclosed an addressed envelope with stamps for your convenience which can be return to me before the start of this research.

Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Lu Bai

APPENDIX 1.4

Consent Letter to Teachers (Chinese)

2005-04-19

幼儿园教师

江西省

RE：关于对当今中国学前教育政策和实践的研究

亲爱的_____老师：

您好，本人正在进行一项对当今中国早期幼儿教育政策和实践的研究。这个研究着眼于描述和分析当前中国早期幼儿教育的主要特点并且对当今幼儿教育政策（宏观方面）是如何被理解和运用到幼儿园实践工作（微观方面）中的过程做了详细的说明和阐述。因此，这封介绍信旨在介绍我的研究方法以及征求关于您和您的幼儿园参与到我的研究中的意见。目前，这项研究到了收集和分析相关资料的阶段，其中包括相关资料收集，问卷调查，课堂观察，以及访谈。因此，您的参与将有助于这项研究的进程并且为这项研究提供宝贵的意见。所有资料将仅用于研究需要，您的任何信息及想法将不会公开并且得到全面的保护。如果您愿意参与到这项研究中请在信的开头填上您的姓名并寄还给我，如有任何问题请致电13317912100 与本人联系。

谢谢您的合作！

致

敬礼

APPENDIX 1.5

Consent Letter to Parents (English)

04 February 2005
Preschool Parents
Jiangxi Province

RE: The China Preschool Policy to Practice Context Project

Dear _____ Mr/Mrs,

I am conducting research on current changing early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy to practice context in China. The study will focus on describing and analysing the main characteristics of the ECEC policy to practice context in the contemporary China. An in-depth analysis of current policy (at the macro level) as interpreted and implemented in local practice (at the micro level) will be undertaken. In such respect, the letter which is sent to you will be seeking for your permission of doing the research with you and your child.

I am in the process of collecting general data to be used in the study which including documents collection, questionnaire survey, observation, and interview. It would be grateful if you and your child could participate in my research. All information provided will be used only for research purposes and no names or identification will be disclosed. If you agree to participate in this research, please fill in your surname and send this letter back to me. I have enclosed an addressed envelope with stamps for your convenience which can be return to me before the start of this research.

Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Your faithfully

Lu Bai

APPENDIX 1.6

Consent Letter to Parents (Chinese)

2005-04-19

幼儿园家长

江西省

RE：关于对当今中国学前教育政策和实践的研究

亲爱的_____先生/女士：

您好，本人正在进行一项对当今中国早期幼儿教育政策和实践的研究。这个研究着眼于描述和分析当前中国早期幼儿教育的主要特点并且对当今幼儿教育政策（宏观方面）是如何被理解和运用到幼儿园实践工作（微观方面）中的过程做了详细的说明和阐述。因此，这封介绍信旨在介绍我的研究方法以及征求您的意见。目前，这项研究到了收集和分析相关资料的阶段，其中包括相关资料收集，问卷调查，课堂观察，以及访谈。因此，您的参与将有助于这项研究的进程并且为这项研究提供宝贵的意见。所有资料将仅用于研究需要，您的任何信息及想法将不会公开并且得到全面的保护。如果您愿意参与到这项研究中请在信的开头填上您的姓名并寄还给我，如有任何问题请致电 13317912100 与本人联系。

谢谢您的合作！

致

敬礼

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2.1

Questionnaire to Teachers (English)

I am conducting research on current changes to early childhood education and care (ECEC) in China. The study focuses on describing and analysing the main characteristics of ECEC policy to practice context in contemporary China. In this respect, the questionnaire aims to find out your views of ECEC and your knowledge and beliefs about ECEC in the child's early years. It will take you about 20 minutes to fill in. Thank you very much for your time and efforts.

Section A.

The following section involves general information about you as a kindergarten teacher and your class.

Please tick (√) the appropriate response

1. Are you:

Male	□1
Female	□2

2. What is your age:

Less than	20 years	□1
Between	20-29 years	□2
	30-39 years	□3
	40-49 years	□4
Over	50 years	□5

3. How long have you been working in kindergartens?

0-2 years	□1
3-5 years	□2
6-10 years	□3
11-15 years	□4
16-20 years	□5
Over 20 years	□6

4. Which age group are you currently teaching?

Xiao Ban (3-4 years)	□1
Zhong Ban (4-5 years)	□2
Da Ban (5-6 years)	□3
Others (Please State)	□0

.....

5. Number of children:..... Girls: (1)..... Boys: (2).....

6. Children's age range: **From** .....years.....months **To** .....years.....months

Section B.

This section targets the views of ECEC which will influence the choice of

activities, classroom arrangement, and parental involvement.

Please tick (√) the appropriate response

B1. Qualifications and Professional Development

7. When you first started as a kindergarten teacher, what was your original qualification?

.....

8. What age group was your initial training for?

Birth to 3 years	□1
3 to 6 years	□2
6 to 12 years	□3
Secondary	□4
Other (Please State)	□0

.....

9. Since your original qualification, have you had any other training for working in early childhood?

Yes	□1
No	□2

If yes, please answer question 10 and 11; if no, please go to question 12.

10. If yes, can you say what additional training/qualification you have completed or are you currently working on (including short courses, in-service training, and degree/certificate/diploma courses)?

	A Completed	B Working on
a) In-service training	□1	□2
b) Short courses	□3	□4
c) Diploma	□5	□6
d) Bachelor degree	□7	□8
e) Master degree	□9	□10
f) Other (Please State)	□0	□00

.....

11. Please indicate what areas those courses relate to.

Please tick (√) as many as appropriate

Teaching methodology	□1
Classroom management	□2
Class activities	□3
Teaching English as a foreign language	□4

Mathematics development □5
Language skills □6
Story telling □7
Dancing and singing □8
Physical development □9
Creative development □10
Other (Please State) □0

.....

.....

B2. Teaching Philosophy

12. Do you have any particular philosophy that underpins learning and teaching?

Yes □1
No □2

If yes, answer question 13; if no, please state the reasons in question 14.

13. What philosophies do you apply to your class?

Traditional Chinese child development theories □1
Western child development theories □2
Combination of Chinese and Western theories □3
Other (Please State) □0

.....

14. Please state your reasons in the space below.

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.....

B3. The Curriculum

15. Which aspects of curriculum do you regard as most important?

Please rank the top five aspects in order of importance (1-5), with 1 as most important

Social and emotional development □
Language and communication abilities □
Mathematics and numeracy □
Scientific understanding and knowledge of the world □
Creative and imaginative development and aesthetical □
Physical development □
Moral development □

16. How important do you feel each of the following skills is for children to learn

during the preschool period?

Please rate them according to: 1 very important; 2 important; 3 not sure; 4 unimportant; 5 not important at all

Concentration	□1
Social abilities	□2
Motivation	□3
Working with others	□4
Independence	□5
Enthusiastic for learning	□6
Imagination	□7

17. Is there any guidance provided for planning the curriculum?

National guidance	□1
Provincial guidance	□2
School guidance	□3
No guidance	□0

18. Do you attend any staff development activities in term of understanding the curriculum?

Yes	□1
No	□2

B4. Parental Involvements

19. Do you provide curriculum information to parents?

Written information	□1
Meetings	□2
No information	□0

20. Is any requirement from parents taken into consideration when preparing your class curriculum?

Yes	□1
No	□2

21. How, if at all, are parents involved in young children's teaching and learning?

Participating in teaching and daily activities	□1
Parents associations	□2
Meetings with fellow parents and teachers	□3
Helping with work outside school	□4
Not any involvement	□0

B5. Classroom Arrangement

22. How do you group children in classes?

By age	□1
By gender	□2
By ability	□3
Other (Please State)	□0

.....

23. How do you group children in playground?

By age	□1
By gender	□2
By ability	□3
Other (Please State)	□0

.....

24. Approximately, what percentage of time is spent grouped as:

A whole class	.....%
A small group	.....%
An individual	.....%

25. Do children have opportunities to choose or self-initiate activities themselves?

Yes	□1
No	□2

If yes, please answer question 26; if no, please go to question 27

26. What are the most common activities children choose?

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.....
.....

B6. Monitoring Children's Achievement

27. Are there any records to monitor children's progress or achievement?

Yes	□1
No	□2

If yes, please answer question 28, 29 and 30; if no, please go to B7

28. How often do you keep children's progress or achievement?

Daily	□1
Weekly	□2
Monthly	□3
Termly	□4

Yearly □5

29. What type of records do you generally keep?

Written observation □1

Photographic records □2

Video recording □3

Annotated samples of work □4

Feedback from parents □5

Children's feedback of their view of learning □6

Other (Please State) □0

.....

30. How do you use the information or records?

Planning teaching activities □1

Writing reports □2

Meeting with parents □3

Self development □4

Other (Please State) □0

.....

B7. Transition into Primary Schools

31. Does the kindergarten have any links with local primary school?

Yes □1

No □2

If yes, please answer question 32; if no, please go to 33.

32. What do you do to prepare children for the transition to primary schooling?

Children make visits before transition □1

Children's records are sent to primary schools □2

Meetings with primary school teachers □3

No actions before transition □0

33. What do parents think is important for children to know/be able to do by school entry time?

Please tick (√) as many as appropriate

Personal and social skills □1

Language and communication skills □2

Mathematical skills □3

Learning English as a foreign language □4

Scientific skills and understanding □5

Physical skills □6

Creative skills □7

Other (Please State) □0

.....

B8. Current Change of Policy in Early Childhood Education

34. As a class teacher, what changes, if any, have you seen in early childhood practice over the last five years?

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35. Is there any other information which you would like to add? If so, please use the following space.

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2.2

Questionnaire to Teachers (Chinese)

本人正在进行一项对目前中国早期幼儿教育的研究。这个研究着眼于描述和分析当前中国早期幼儿教育政策到实践的主要特点。因此，这份问卷的目标是针对您对早期幼儿教育在孩子早期阶段的作用的理解和认识。这份问卷只需要花费您 20 分钟来完成，非常感谢您给予的帮助。

第一节.

接下来的内容将涉及到作为幼儿园教师的您以及您所在的班级的基本信息

请在合适的内容处打勾 (√)

1　您的性别：

男　□1

女　□2

1. 您的年纪：

20 岁以下　□1

20 到 29 岁之间　□2

30 到 39 岁之间　□3

40 到 49 岁之间　□4

50 岁以上　□5

2. 您担任幼儿园教师有多长时间？

0-2年　□1

3-5年　□2

6-10年　□3

11-15年　□4

16-20年　□5

20 年以上　□6

3. 您目前所担任的年级是：

小班（3-4 岁）　□1

中班（4-5 岁）　□2

大班（5-6 岁）　□3

其他（请详细说明）　□0

.....

4. 您班级的人数：..... 女生的人数：（1）..... 男生的人数：（2）.....

5. 孩子的年龄段：从 .....岁.....个月 到 .....岁.....个月

第二节.

这个部分旨在了解您对早期幼儿教育的理解以及您对它的理解所带来的一系列的

影响其中包括教学活动的选择，课堂安排以及孩子父母参与的教与学。

请在合适的内容处打勾 (√)

2.1 您的学历以及职业发展和培训

6. 在您成为幼儿园教师的时候，您的学历是什么？

.....

7. 您最初接受培训的时候所涉及到的年龄层是哪一个？

0 到 3 岁	□1
3 到 6 岁	□2
6 到 12 岁	□3
中学生	□4
其他（请详细说明）	□0

.....

8. 除了您最初的学历以外，您是否接受过任何与幼儿教育有关的培训？

是	□1
否	□2

如果您选择是，请在回答完第 10 和 11 题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答第 12 题

9. 如果是，请指出任何培训或者证书您已经完成或者正在进行（包括短期培训，在职培训以及任何与拿学位有关的课程）

	A 已完成	B 正在进行中
a) 在职培训	□1	□2
b) 短期课程	□3	□4
c) 大专	□5	□6
d) 本科	□7	□8
e) 研究生	□9	□10
f) 其他（请详细说明）	□0	□00

.....

10. 请指出您的课程和以下哪些内容有关。（多项选择）

教学方法	□1
课堂安排	□2
课内活动	□3

英语教学 □4

数学教学 □5

语言能力教学 □6

讲故事 □7

舞蹈和唱歌 □8

体能练习 □9

培养孩子创造性 □10

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

2.2 您的教育理念

11. 您是否运用某些教育理念来支持您的教与学？

是 □1

否 □2

如果您选择是，请回答第 13 道问题；如果您选择否，请在第 14 题中陈诉理由

12. 在您的教学过程中，您运用了以下哪种教育理念？

中国传统的幼儿发展理论 □1

西方幼儿发展理论 □2

结合中国和西方幼儿发展的理论 □3

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

13. 如果您认为在实际教学中不需要运用这些教育理念请在以下空格内陈述您的理由？

.....

.....

2.3 幼儿园的课程安排

14. 以下是幼儿园课程的相关内容，请选出您认为最重要的 5 项。（**请按照 1-5 的顺序选出您认为最重要的 5 项。1 为最重要并以此类推**）

社会性和情感发展 □

语言和交流能力 □

算术和数字能力 □

对世界科学的理解和认识 □

创造力，想象力和美学的发展 □

体格的发展 □

德育的发展 □

15. 通过幼儿园的培养和教育，孩子的各项能力逐渐提高。**（请按照 1 非常重要；2 重要；3 不确定；4 不重要；5 根本不重要，给以下与课程相关的能力排序）**

注意力 □1

学习的动力 □2

团队/合作精神 □3

自理能力 □4

热爱学习 □5

想象力 □6

16. 在您准备教学内容的时候，是否有相关的参考资料提供给您？

全国性的参考资料 □1

全省性的参考资料 □2

幼儿园所提供的参考资料 □3

没有任何参考资料 □0

17. 您的学校是否提供给您相关的在职培训以提高教师对课程内容的理解？

是 □1

否 □2

2.4 父母参与孩子教与学

18. 您是否为孩子父母提供幼儿园课程信息？

书面信息 □1

家长会 □2

不提供任何信息 □0

19. 家长的要求和意见是否会作为您备课的参考？

是 □1

否 □2

20. 家长是如何融入在孩子教与学当中的？

参加孩子的每日的教学活动 □1

与其他孩子父母建立联系 □2

定期与老师和其他家长碰面 □3

帮忙组织孩子的课后活动 □4

不参与任何活动 □0

2.5 课堂活动以及安排

21. 在某些课堂活动中，您是如何给孩子分组的？

按年龄分配	□1
按性别分配	□2
按照孩子的能力分配	□3
其他（请详细说明）	□0

.....

22. 在某些室外活动中，您又是如何给孩子分组的？

按年龄分配	□1
按性别分配	□2
按照孩子的能力分配	□3
其他（请详细说明）	□0

.....

23. 以下 3 种课堂安排在您的教学活动当中所占的比例是多少？

全班活动	.....%
小组活动	.....%
个人活动	.....%

24. 您是否认为您提供给孩子机会选择或者开展自主性游戏？

是	□1
否	□2

如果您选择是，请在回答完第 26 题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答 27 题

25. 您认为什么是孩子们最普遍选择的自主性游戏？

.....

.....

2.6 关注孩子的学习成果

26. 您是否会保留孩子的资料以便您关注孩子在幼儿园的发展及学习成果？

是	□1
否	□2

如果您选择是，请在回答完第 28 到 30 道题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答第 31 题

27. 您多久就会记录一次孩子的发展及学习成果？

每天	□1
每星期	□2

每个月 □3

每学期 □4

每年 □5

28. 通常您都会记录哪些以孩子有关的信息？

对孩子观察的记录 □1

照片 □2

录像带 □3

孩子的作业 □4

家长的反馈意见 □5

孩子课堂完成的手工作品，图画和文字作业 □6

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

29. 通常您都是如何使用这些信息和记录？

作为备课的参考 □1

作为写总结和评语的参考 □2

作为开家长会的参考资料 □3

自身发展和提高的资料 □4

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

2.7 孩子从幼儿园到小学的过渡

30. 您所在的幼儿园是否和市里的任何小学建立了联系？

是 □1

否 □2

如果你选择是，请在回答完第 32 题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答 33 题

31. 在孩子升学前，您都会为孩子的升学做些什么？

在孩子升学前参观某些小学 □1

为小学提供孩子的档案 □2

孩子和小学老师碰面 □3

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

32. 到小学入学的时候，以下哪些您认为孩子的父母会希望孩子了解或者学会？（多项选择）

个人和社会技能 □1

语言和交流技能 □2

算术能力 □3

掌握一定的英语会话 □4

对科学的理解和相关能力 □5

体育技能 □6

创造力 □7

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

2.8 当前早期幼儿教育政策的转变

33. 作为幼儿园教师，您是否意识或感觉到近 10 年内早期幼儿教育理念的改变？

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34. 如果您还有什么需要补充的，请利用以下空格填写您的想法。

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非常感谢您能完成这份问卷

APPENDIX 2.3

Questionnaire to Parents (English)

I am conducting research on current early childhood education and care (ECEC) in China. The study focuses on describing and analysing the main characteristics of the ECEC policy to practice context in contemporary China. In this respect, this questionnaire aims to find out your views of ECEC and your knowledge and beliefs about ECEC in your child's early years. It will take you about 20 minutes to fill this in and thank you very much for your time and efforts.

Section A.

The following section involves general information about your child and you as the child's parents.

Please tick (√) the appropriate response

1. Child's gender:

   Male □1

   Female □2

2. School year:

   Xiao Ban (3 to 4 years) □1

   Zhong Ban (4 to 5 years) □2

   Da Ban (5 to 6 years) □3

   Others (Please State) □0

   .....

3. Type of school the child attends: (indicate with a tick).

   State Kindergarten □1

   Private Kindergarten □2

   Kindergarten attached to Organisation or Company □3

4. Mother's age:

   Between 20-29 years □1

   30-39 years □2

   Less than 40 years □3

5. Father's age:

   Between 20-29 years □1

   30-39 years □2

   Less than 40 years □3

6. Mother's level of education:

   Primary or Secondary □1

   Further Education □2

   Certificate □3

Diploma □4

University Degree □5

Other (Please State) □0

.....

7. Father's level of education:

Primary or Secondary □1

Further Education □2

Certificate □3

Diploma □4

University Degree □5

Other (Please State) □0

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8. Mother's occupation:

Service industry □1

Tourism □2

IT industry □3

Education □4

Business/Finance/Economic □5

Food industry □6

Mass communication □7

Self employed □8

Other (Please State) □0

.....

9. Father's occupation:

Service industry □1

Tourism □2

IT industry □3

Education □4

Business/Finance/Economic □5

Food industry □6

Mass communication □7

Self employed □8

Other (Please State) □0

.....

Section B.

This section is to find out your understanding of ECEC and the importance of ECEC for child's overall development.

Please tick (√) the appropriate response

B1. Perception towards the Kindergarten

10. Why did you choose this particular kindergarten for your child ?

Tick (√) as many as appropriate

Reputation □1
Head teachers and teachers □2
Teaching and learning activities □3
Health and safety issues □4
School facilities □5
Other (Please State) □0

.....

11. What is your expectation from the kindergarten?

Quality teaching and learning activities □1
Head teachers and teachers' interaction with children □2
Children's achievement □3
Good preparation for formal schooling □4
Child health and safety □5
Other (Please State) □0

.....

B2. Kindergarten Curriculum and Parental Involvement

12. Are you provided with information about the curriculum?

Written information □1
Meetings □2
Interviews □3
No information □0

13. Which aspects of the curriculum do you regards as most important?

Please rank the top five aspects in order of importance (1-5), with 1 as most important

Social and emotional development □
Language and communication abilities □
Mathematics and numeracy □
Scientific understanding and knowledge of the world □

Creative and imaginative development and aesthetical □

Physical development □

Moral development □

14. How important do you think the following skills are for the preschool children to learn?

Please rate them according to: 1 very important; 2 important; 3 not sure;

4 unimportant; 5 not important at all

Concentration □1

Motivation □2

Working with others □3

Independence □4

Enthusiastic for learning □5

Imagination □6

15. As a parent, what do you think is the most important for your child? (Please choose only one)

Academic achievement □1

Overall development □2

Social ability □3

Other (Please State) □0

.....

16. How are you, if at all, involved in the young children's teaching and learning?

Participating in teaching and daily activities □1

Parents associations □2

Meetings with fellow parents and teachers □3

Helping with work outside school □4

Not any involvement □0

B3. Monitoring Children's Achievement

17. How often do teachers provide you with information about your child?

Daily □1

Weekly □2

Monthly □3

Termly □4

Yearly □5

No records □0

18. What types of information do teachers provide to you?

School information □1

Class information □2

Annotated samples of work □3

Children's handicrafts, drawings and written work □4

Other (Please State) □0

.....

19. Would you like to have more information?

Yes □1

No □2

If yes, please answer question 20; if no please go to question 21.

20. Please state any further information you would like to know from teachers and schools.

.....

.....

.....

.....

B4. Children's Free Activities

21. Do you think your child has opportunities to choose or carry out self-initiated activities at school?

Yes □1

No □2

B5. Transition into Primary Schools

22. Do you think the kindergarten should prepare your child for the primary schooling?

Yes □1

No □2

If yes, please answer question 27; if no, please go to question 28

23. What do you think the kindergarten should do to prepare your child for formal schooling?

Children make visits before transition □1

Children's records are sent to primary schools □2

Meetings with primary school teachers □3

Other (Please State) □0

.....

24. What do you think is important for children to know/be able to do by school entry?

Please tick (√) as many as appropriate

Personal and social skills	□1
Language and communication skills	□2
Mathematical skills	□3
Learning English as a foreign language	□4
Scientific skills and understanding	□5
Physical skills	□6
Creative skills	□7
Other (Please State)	□0

.....

B6. Current Change of Polices in Early Childhood Education

25. As a parent, what changes, if any, have you seen in early childhood education over the last five years?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

26. Is there any other information which you would like to add? If so, please use the following space.

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.....
.....
.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2.4

Questionnaire to Parents (Chinese)

本人正在进行一项对目前中国早期幼儿教育的研究。这个研究着眼于描述和分析当前中国早期幼儿教育政策到实践的主要特点。因此，这份问卷的目标是针对您对早期幼儿教育在孩子早期阶段的作用的理解和认识。这份问卷只需要花费您 20 分钟来完成，非常感谢您给予的帮助。

第一节.

接下来的内容将涉及到您的孩子和您的一些基本信息。

请在合适的内容处打勾 (√)

1. 孩子的性别：

男 □1

女 □2

2. 年级：

小班（3 到 4 岁） □1

中班（4 到 5 岁） □2

大班（5 到 6 岁） □3

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

3. 幼儿园的办学形式：

公立幼儿园 □1

私立幼儿园 □2

附属幼儿园 □3

4. 妈妈的年纪：

20-25 岁之间 □1

26-30 岁之间 □2

31-35 岁之间 □3

36-40 岁之间 □4

40 岁以上 □5

5. 爸爸的年纪：

20-25 岁之间 □1

26-30 岁之间 □2

31-35 岁之间 □3

36-40 岁之间 □4

40 岁以上 □5

6. 妈妈的教育程度：

小学或中学 □1
中专 □2
大专 □3
本科 □4
研究生或博士 □5
其他（请详细说明） □0
……

7. 爸爸的教育程度：

小学或中学 □1
中专 □2
大专 □3
本科 □4
研究生或博士 □5
其他（请详细说明） □0
……

8. 妈妈的职业：

服务行业 □1
旅游业 □2
IT 产业 □3
教育业 □4
经济/金融/财经 □5
食品行业 □6
大众传媒 □7
个体户 □8
其他（请详细说明） □0
……

9. 爸爸的职业：

服务行业 □1
旅游业 □2
IT 产业 □3
教育业 □4
经济/金融/财经 □5

食品行业 □6

大众传媒 □7

个体户 □8

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

第二节.

这个部分旨在了解您对早期幼儿教育的理解和认识；并且了解您对早期幼儿教育对孩子全面发展重要性的看法。

请在合适的内容处打勾 (√)

2.1 您对幼儿园的了解

10. 您选择这所幼儿园的理由：（多项选择）

幼儿园的名气 □1

院长和老师的水平以及对孩子的关爱 □2

孩子在幼儿园的健康和安全问题 □3

幼儿园的配套设施 □4

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

11. 您对这所幼儿园的期待是什么？

高品质的教学活动 □1

院长，老师和孩子的互动 □2

孩子能力的提高 □3

为小学做准备 □4

对孩子健康和安全的考量 □5

其他（请详细说明） □0

2.2 幼儿园的课程安排和父母亲参与孩子的教与学

12. 学校是否为您提供必要的课程信息？

文字信息 □□1

定期碰头会 □2

访谈 □3

没有任何信息 □0

13. 以下是幼儿园课程的相关内容，请选出您认为最重要的 5 项。**（请按照 1-5 的顺序选出您认为最重要的 5 项。1 为最重要并以此类推）**

社会性和情感发展 □

语言和交流能力 □

算术和数字能力 □

对世界科学的理解和认识 □

创造力，想象力和美学的发展 □

体格的发展 □

德育的发展 □

14. 通过幼儿园的培养和教育，孩子的各项能力逐渐提高。**（请按照 1 非常重要；2 重要；3 不确定；4 不重要；5 根本不重要，给以下与课程相关的能力排序）**

注意力 □1

学习的动力 □2

团队/合作精神 □3

自理能力 □4

热爱学习 □5

想象力 □6

15. 作为孩子的家长，以下这几点中的哪一点您认为对您孩子是最重要的？（单项选择）

学习方面的成绩 □1

整体的发展（德智体美） □2

社会能力（与人相处） □3

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

16. 您是怎么样融入到孩子的教与学当中的？

参加孩子的每日的教学活 □1

与其他孩子父母建立联系 □2

定期与老师和其他家长碰面 □3

帮忙组织孩子的课后活动 □4

不参与任何活动 □0

2.3 关注孩子的学习成果

17. 孩子的老师多久会向您提供与您孩子有关的信息？

每天 □1

每星期 □2

每个月 □3

每学期 □4

每年 □5

不提供任何信息 □0

18. 孩子的老师会提供给您什么样的信息？

学校的相关信息 □1

班级信息 □2

批改过的作业 □3

孩子课堂完成的手工作品，图画和文字作业 □4

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

19. 您是否希望得到更多的信息？

是 □1

否 □2

如果您选择是，请在回答完第 20 题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答 21 题

20. 请陈诉任何您希望从老师和幼儿园处得到的相关信息。

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.4 孩子的自主性游戏

21. 您是否认为在幼儿园里，您的孩子有机会选择或者开展自主性游戏？

是 □1

否 □2

2.5 孩子从幼儿园到小学的过渡

22. 您是否认为幼儿园应该为您孩子过渡到小学做准备？

是 □1

否 □2

如果您选择是，请在回答完第 23 题后继续答题；如果您选择否，请回答 24 题

23. 如果您认为幼儿园应该为孩子升学做准备，那么您认为幼儿园应该为您孩子做哪些准备？

在孩子升学前参观某些小学 □1

为小学提供孩子的相关信息 □2

孩子和小学老师碰面 □3

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

24. 到小学入学的时候，以下哪些您认为孩子应该了解或者应该学会？（多项选择）

个人和社会技能 □1

语言和交流技能 □2

算术能力 □3

掌握一定的英语会话 □4

对科学的理解和相关能力 □5

体育技能 □6

创造力 □7

其他（请详细说明） □0

.....

2.6 当前早期幼儿教育政策的转变

25. 作为孩子的家长，您是否意识或感觉到近 10 年内早期幼儿教育理念的改变？

.....

.....

.....

26. 如果您还有什么需要补充的，请利用以下空格填写您的想法。

.....

.....

.....

.....

非常感谢您能完成这份卷

APPENDIX 3

APPENDIX 3.1

Interview Questionnaire to Head Teachers (English)

Firstly, I would like to get some background information about you and your kindergarten.

1. Could you tell me something about your kindergarten?

- Type, Number of Classes, Size, Financial provision, Managerial provision

2. Could you tell me something about yourself and your qualification?

- How long have you been working in kindergarten?

- How long have you been working as a head teacher?

Secondly, I would like to get detailed information about the curriculum, teacher training, kindergarten-parents co-operation, etc.

3. What curriculum is your kindergarten currently using?

- When did you start to use it?

- Why do you choose it?

- Are there any pitfalls and good points of it?

4. Do you have any curriculum guidance for this curriculum?

- Do you think it is suitable for your kindergarten?

- Do you think teachers understand the content of the curriculum, the purpose of each unit, and know how to carry it out?

5. Do you provide curriculum information to parents?

- Is any requirement from parents taken into consideration of choosing activities?

6. How do you carry out teacher training for both experienced and new teachers?

- What type of the training?

- How do you fund these training?

- How often do you do the training?

- Do you think your teachers can get enough training every year?

7. Does your kindergarten set up any cooperation relationship with parents?

- How do parents involve in?

- Do you think parents are willing to participate in cooperation?

- Do you think it is necessary to set up the relationship?

8. How do you deal with parents requirements, suggestions and complains?

- Do you think your teachers can do the same as you do to parents?

9. How do you do to prepare children for the primary school?

10. How do you regard the early stage of children?

- What do you think is the most important at this stage for children?

11. How do you feel about being a kindergarten head teacher?

APPENDIX 3.2

Interview Questionnaire to Head Teachers (Chinese)

首先，我想了解以下您的一些基本情况，包括您所在的幼儿园：

1. 请简单介绍一下您的幼儿园

- 办学形式，班级总数，班级人数，教师人数，财政拨款形式

2. 请简单介绍一下您自己和您的学历

- 在这所幼儿园您干了多久？- 担任院长一职有多长的时间？

3. 目前幼儿园所采用的教材

- 何时开始使用的？- 之前所用的教材是什么？

- 为何选择这份教材？- 这份教材的优缺点是什么？

4. 这份教材是否有施行纲要？

- 它是否适合您的幼儿园？

- 教师是否能完全地理解它的内容，教学目的，并知道如何根据实际灵活运用？

5. 幼儿园是否会提供课程信息给家长？

- 家长的要求和建议是否会作为教师进行教学活动的参考？

6. 您的幼儿园是如何对教师进行培训的？

- 具体有哪些培训？- 培训的资金和费用如何获得？

- 多久一次培训？- 幼儿园是否提供足够的培训？

7. 这所幼儿园是否建立任何形式的家园互动？

- 家长是否参与其中？- 家长是否愿意参与？

- 建立家园互动的必要性？

8. 您是如何处理家长的要求和不满或者是投诉？

- 教师是否能做到一样的要求？

9. 幼儿园将如何为幼儿的升学做准备？

10. 您是如何看到幼儿的早期阶段（3 到 6 岁）？

- 在这个阶段什么您认为是最重要的？

11. 您是如何看待您的职业的？

APPENDIX 3.3

Interview Questionnaire to Teachers (English)

Firstly, I would like to get background information about you.

1. How long have you been working as a kindergarten teacher?

- Your qualification

Secondly, I would like to get detailed views about your understanding of curriculum, trainings, kindergarten-parents relationship, etc.

2. What curriculum are you currently using?

- How do you feel about it?

- Do you think it fulfils the needs of child's development?

- Do you think it is suitable for your class?

- Do you fully understand the curriculum?

- Can you carry it out without difficulties?

3. Does the kindergarten provide you with any training?

- Type of the training

- How often do you attend the training?

- Do you think it is enough? / if not, what training do you think you need more?

- Do you think it is necessary to do the training? / what kind of training do you think is unnecessary?

4. Do you keep children's records?

- What do you keep?

- How often

- Why do you keep?

5. Do you have any co-operation with parents?

- Do you think they like to cooperate with you?

- If not, what will you do?

6. How do you deal with parents requirements, suggestions and complains?

7. How do you prepare children for the primary school?

8. How do you think about the early stage of children?

- What do you think is the most important for children at this stage?

9. How do you feel about being a kindergarten teacher?

APPENDIX 3.4

Interview Questionnaire to Teachers (Chinese)

首先，我想了解一下您作为一名幼儿教师的情况

1. 您的学历和您的教龄？

接下来，我想了解您对幼儿园课程安排，教师培训，家园互动等方面的信息

2. 您现在所用的教材

- 您对这份教材的理解和感受
- 这份教材是否完全尊重幼儿的发展规律
- 就您所在的班级而言，这份教材是否完全适合
- 您对这份教材是否有全面的认识
- 您在运用过程中是否能根据教材的要求

3. 幼儿园是否对您进行过培训？

- 具体有哪些培训？频率？
- 是否足够，如果不是，还需要哪些？
- 培训是否必要？

4. 您是否记录孩子的信息？

- 都记录什么信息？
- 频率和内容

5. 您与家长是否有联系并有必要的合作？

- 家长是否愿意配合您的工作？
- 如果不愿意，您将怎么办？

6. 您是如何对待家长的要求，建议和不满？

7. 您是否为幼儿的升学做准备？

8. 您是如何看待这个年龄段（3 到 6 岁）的幼儿？

- 什么对他们是最重要的在这个阶段？

9. 作为一名幼儿教师，您是如何看待这个职业的？

APPENDIX 3.5

Interview Questionnaire to Parents (English)

Firstly, I would like to get some information about your views towards the kindergarten.

1. Why do you choose this kindergarten?

2. What are your expectations of this kindergarten?

Secondly, I would like to get detailed information about your understanding of curriculum, parental involvement, etc.

3. Do you know what curriculum is the kindergarten currently using?

- How do you know about it?
- What else do you know about the curriculum?

4. Do you think your requirement/suggestions will be accepted by teachers?

- Do you think once they accept, they will put it into action?

5. How do you do if you have complains?

6. Are you willing to co-operate with kindergarten/teachers?

7. What are your expectations of your children after 3 years in kindergarten?

- How do you evaluate child's achievement?

8. What do you think is the most important for your child at the early stage?

APPENDIX 3.6

Interview Questionnaire to Parents (Chinese)

首先，我想了解一下您对幼儿园的看法

1. 当您在选择幼儿园的时候，您都会做哪些方面的考虑？

2. 当选择了幼儿园后，您对幼儿园有哪些要求或者说是期望？

接下来，我想了解您对幼儿园课程安排，家园互动等方面的信息

3. 您知道目前这所幼儿园所使用的教材吗？

- 您是如何得知的？

- 具体了解哪些方面的信息？

4. 您认为平时您提出的要求或者建议，教师和幼儿园会/应该接受吗？

- 如果接受了， 他们会用于实践中吗？

5. 如果对教师的行为有所看法或者不满，您一般会怎么做？

6. 您是否愿意配合幼儿园/教师的工作？

7. 对您的孩子您有什么样的期待(3 年后)？

8. 在孩子 3-6 岁阶段，什么是您认为最重要的因素？

APPENDIX 4

Observation Schedule

Time	Tasks/Activities	Actions	
		The Teacher	Children
0.00-5.00			
6.00-10.00			
11.00-15.00			
16.00-20.00			
21.00-25.00			
26.00-30.00			

APPENDIX 5

Story of Mencius' Mother Moves House Three Times (*孟母三迁*)

This story is about the mother of a boy named Mencius (孟子). Mencius became a very famous Chinese moral and educational philosopher: His position in Chinese society is parallel to the founder of Confucianism, Master Kong (孔子). The story is as follows. Mencius was born in the state of Tsou during the Warring States Period in 371BC. When he was 3 years old, he lost his father. When his father died, Mencius and his mother lived in a rural area close to a graveyard. By naturally, 3 years old Mencius quickly began imitating the grieving persons he saw burying the dead at the cemetery, crying and weeping much of the time. Seeing this, his mother thought this neighbourhood was a bad influence on Mencius, so she moved to the city—the centre of business. However, her son rapidly picked up the behaviours of merchants, pretending to be a business vendor every day. His mother then thought 'this will never do' and they moved again. The third time, she moved next to a royal institution where only very privileged children were able to go. There things were different, Mencius started to learn etiquette and manner. He and other children played at being orderly and polite. 'Now this is the right kind of place for my boy', his mother said to herself. Eventually, he became a famous philosopher in Chinese history.

APPENDIX 6

Teaching Planning (T2-K1)

九　月　份　计　划 (Planning for September)

目 标	主要教育活动内容参考				环境创设	家长工作	社区活动	观察评估
		集体活动		区域活动				
		全班	小组					
自主选组，并思考、讨论分组的一些要求。体验成为中班小朋友的自豪感。能整齐地沿线剪、折，制作四面体。体验与同组小朋友合作的快乐。感受、理解故事角色间真挚的友情。懂得朋友间应互相关心、帮助。 感知物体的高矮，懂得“高与矮”的比较是相对的。能按高矮给予五个物体排序，初步体验其中的快乐。懂得只要有爱心，不管能力大小都可以帮助别人愿意给予别人带去快乐。知道自己的生日及好朋友生日的月份。增进朋友之间的友谊。	科学探索活动	〈自行车和摩托车〉、《开车》《慢吞吞的压路机》	《高朋友和矮朋友》	娃娃家《给娃娃过生日》	注意营造友好、温馨的气氛，使幼儿体验朋友间的友情，产生集体归属感。 设置“好朋友”园地，将幼儿带来的好朋友照片，以及在美工区里画的一对好朋友剪下巾在园地里，并不断丰富内容，激发幼儿的同伴之情。与幼儿共同制作同心树。在自然角饲养金鱼、乌龟、泥鳅等小动物。在活动室里放置汽车、摩托车、飞机、轮船等交通工具的模型，供幼儿观察、了解这些、交通工具的特点。	1、关注孩子的假期生活，收集并提供孩子的美工作品等。引导孩子了解自己的生日，和孩子一起为生日的小朋友制作生日礼物，商量一句祝福的话。 2、引导孩子主动帮助家人做一些力所能及的事，体验长大了的积极情绪。 3、能有意识地带孩子到马路上观察车辆、行人等的速度，感受快慢的相对性。在日常生活中根据情况提醒孩子做事	观察《马路上的汽车》 注：(请家长委员陪同老师和孩子一起去观察。	1、能自主选组，并思考、讨论分组的一些要求。 2、积极愉快地参与活动，乐意与同伴合作游戏。喜欢与同伴共同游戏，并初步体验其中的快乐。 3、知道自己的生日及好朋友的生日的月份。
	语言交往活动	《找朋友》〈有朋友真好〉、〈大树和小鸟〉、〈听话的朋友〉、〈爱开玩笑的纳纳〉、〈小乌龟看爷爷〉、〈龟兔爬楼谁第一〉	〈想让你高兴〉〈微笑〉、〈马路上〉、〈笑一笑〉、〈跑得快、跑得慢的动物〉、〈节日的景象〉	语言区《打电话》《听话的朋友》				
	体育卫生活动	《快乐岛》、〈脚印桥〉、〈赛车〉、〈我会做慢动作〉	体能活动：《看哪队滚得快》《郊游》					

	数学计算机活动	〈朋友的生日〉、〈逛公园〉、〈数汽车〉、〈前和后〉	〈朋友的生日〉			要注意快慢节奏，养成良好的生活习惯。	
	艺术表现活动	音乐游戏〈火车钻山洞〉、〈哈罗哈罗〉、〈小指勾一勾〉、〈谁来了〉、〈小白兔和大黑熊〉、〈我是发条玩具〉	〈快朋友和慢朋友〉	美工区：《添画》《做小礼物》《友谊链》 益智区〈练习高矮〉，〈点数对应〉			

	自由游戏活动	教师引导幼儿积极参加区域游戏活动，如：买玩具的角色游戏，提高建立相互谦让、相互帮助的意识，并能爱惜玩具。并且让孩子学会自己选择游玩。				

十　月　份　计　划 (Planning for October)

<table>
<tr><th>目 标</th><th colspan="4">主要教育活动内容参考</th><th>环境创设</th><th>家长工作</th><th>社区活动</th><th>观察评估</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">1、谈论自己在国庆假日的经历，表达自己的感受，与同伴分享节日的快乐，能在正方形的比较中看许多快的慢的现象。会用动作和歌声来表示歌曲的力度、速度的变化。体验活动的乐趣。
2、能观察寻找大自然中的色彩，并能用较恰当的语言描述。用自己喜欢的方式画出自己的发现认识数字 3 ,知道它所表示的数量，能根据数字添加或</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">集体活动</td><td rowspan="2">区域活动</td><td rowspan="4">1、用大块面的色彩，引发现觉效果，让幼儿喜爱这些颜色，产生探索、感受红、黄、蓝、绿等色彩的积极性。
2、吸引幼儿共同参与，以“多彩的秋天”为主题布置墙面，丰富自然角，陈列幼儿收集的各种颜色的水果、树叶、花、农作物、落叶等。
3、提供多种多样的菊花供幼儿观察和欣赏。设立“诗歌栏”，将幼儿仿编的诗歌贴在上面。活</td><td rowspan="4">1、家长多带孩子到大自然中，开展观察、种植、收集、捕捉等活动。并用自然物进行制作，如做水果造型，提高孩子的动手能力，发展孩子的语言。
2、家长带孩子外出游玩时，注意指导孩子观察秋天的景物、秋天的色彩，并及时记录孩子的语言表达。建议家长傍晚在家中和幼儿一</td><td rowspan="4">《寻找秋天》</td><td rowspan="4">1、孩子能用自己喜欢的方式画出自己的发现。
2、观察寻找大自然中的色彩，并能用较恰当的语言描述。
3、能按树叶的颜色、大小等特征进行分类，了解整体集合与部分集合的关系。</td></tr>
<tr><td>全班</td><td>小组</td></tr>
<tr><td>科学
探索
活动</td><td>《让气球鼓起来》、〈快和慢〉、《绿绿的蚕豆》</td><td>《香香的黄色》</td><td>娃娃家〈给娃娃穿衣服〉</td></tr>
<tr><td>体育
卫生
活动</td><td>《红眼咪咪》、《拾豆豆》、〈秋游泳池〉</td><td>《超市配送员》</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>语言
交往
活动</td><td>《快乐的节日》、〈生活中的快和慢〉、《乔尼用一个钉锤干活》〈秋天的颜色〉〈美丽菊花〉</td><td>《调皮的太阳》《捉迷藏》《亲亲绿色》〈云彩和风儿〉</td><td>语言区〈蓝色的小花〉〈云彩和风儿〉</td></tr>
</table>

删除多余的实物，使数字和实物的数量一样多。 3、感受、欣赏秋高气爽的秋季景象。 4、认识数字 4，感知数字 4 的实际含义。能自己检查操作的结果。	艺术 表现 活动	《寻找五彩宝贝》《太阳喜欢》《蓝色小花》〈捡树叶〉、〈小树叶〉〈树叶变变变〉	《水果沙拉》《水果造型》	美工区〈颜色对对碰〉〈秋天的水果〉	动室里尽可能增添色彩丰富的物体，以利于幼儿观察、对找色彩。	起观察天空中云彩的变化，感受大自然的美景。		
	数学 计算 活动	《长方形》、〈海的故事〉〈树叶分类〉	《变成一样多》					
	自由 游戏 活动	让幼儿在自由活动中认识夏天的服装，了解夏季人们的活动。比如带他们户外认识太阳。						

十　一　月　　份　　计　　划 (Planning for November)

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<tr><th>目 标</th><th colspan="4">主要教育活动内容参考</th><th>环境创设</th><th>家长工作</th><th>社区活动</th><th>观察评估</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">1、知道几种常见蔬菜的名称与外形特征。感受蔬菜的多种多样。通过观察、劳动、品尝，让幼儿认识玉米及玉米食品。
2、在生动活泼的表演性活动中，了解菜的特点。能感知5以内的数量，认识数字5。知道芹菜对人体的作用以及多种吃法，乐意吃芹菜。</td><td></td><td colspan="2">集体活动</td><td>区域活动</td><td rowspan="4">1、请幼儿收集蔬菜图片，在活动室布置“香香的蔬菜”主题墙饰。将幼儿制作的蔬菜造型放入自然角展览。
2、平时注间检户外大型运动器具的安全性，提醒幼儿注意安全。
3、在户外运动场地上提供多种小型运动器</td><td rowspan="4">1、经常带孩子到菜场去买菜，帮助孩子认识和了解蔬菜。中家中多让孩子帮忙摘菜，做下些简单的凉拌菜和蔬菜沙拉，激发孩子对蔬菜的兴趣，喜欢吃蔬菜。向家长宣传运动对孩子身心发展的意义。带孩子一起收集有关人</td><td rowspan="4">参观菜场、到种植地里去给菜浇水。</td><td rowspan="4">1、蔬菜是孩子每天都直接接触的事物，因此孩子对蔬菜也有了一定的了解。在情境化的游戏中，体会蔬菜与人们生活的关系。
2、通过认识蔬菜幼儿观察、劳动、品尝，让幼儿认识几种常见的蔬菜的名称和外形特征。</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>全班</td><td>小组</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>艺术表现活动</td><td>〈彩色花〉、《梨子小提琴》《扮家家》、《健康歌》</td><td>《我真漂亮》、《制作泡菜》</td><td>提供各种蔬菜进行切片。积木拼拆板。</td></tr>
<tr><td>科学探索活动</td><td>《颜色对对碰》《大蒜哥哥、葱弟弟各韭菜妹妹》</td><td>《香喷喷的玉米》、《切片花盘》、《身体怎样动》</td><td>提供幼儿活动材料认识蔬菜。</td></tr>
<tr><td>数学计算机活动</td><td>《颜色小分队》、《给蔬菜画圈》、《我的朋友在哪里》</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

3、能及几种蔬菜的切片摆放出造型美丽的图案。知道不挑食孩子身体好。体验 5 以内相邻数之间多 1 或少 1 的关系。 4、感受歌曲活、欢快的情绪，能较清楚地演唱歌曲，并唱准休止符。了解一些常见的运动项目，体验做运动员的欢乐和自豪。	体育卫生活动	〈飞舞的彩球〉、《小小运动员》、《天天做操身体好》	〈送菜忙〉、《照镜子》、《班级运动会》		械，供幼儿运动。	体、动物运动的资料。请家长配合孩子做好“我知道的球”调查活动，引导孩子观看一些体育比赛。	3、在活动《运动身体》活动中幼儿能积极探索自己身体的运动机能，能根据同伴的动作做出相应的动作。
	语言交往活动	《三间树叶房子》《彩兔》《彩色牛奶》、《露水磨菇》、《小鬼当家》、《胖胖兔减肥》	《蔬菜一家子》《买菜》、《好吃的芹菜》、《木偶娃》	提供印有蔬菜图片的书籍。蔬菜装订的画。			
	白由游戏活动	幼儿自由性地选择自己喜欢的玩具。如《攀登架》、《滑滑梯》、《拍皮球》等。					

十 二 月 份 计 划 (Planning for December)

目 标	主要教育活动内容参考				环境创设	家长工作	社区活动	观察评估
		集体活动		区域活动				
		全班	小组					
1、乐意用各种方式表达自己的情绪，体验创编歌曲的快乐。 2、能以积极愉快的情绪参加新年庆祝活动，感受节日的欢快。 3、听鼓点有节奏地做蹲、起、摇头摇尾、左右上举、快乐地走跑等动作，提高同伴合作的协调性。 4、知道每年的一月一日是元旦，是新年的第一天 。 4、感知6的数量，	科学探索活动	科学活动：《足球小人》探索活动：《玩玩具、真开心》	科学活动：《蚂蚁进行图（一）（二）》、科学游戏：《新邻居》	探索使各种玩具动起来的方法。幼儿为电动玩具安装电池	1 布置一处主题墙饰，内容是小朋友们正在高高兴兴地做各类游戏，使幼儿受到感染，产生快乐情绪。 2、在活动室墙面上挂一本日历，供幼儿观察，期待快乐新年的临近。 3、师幼共同布置活动室，迎接新年的到来。	1 每天睡前由家长为孩子记录当天令他们感到愉快的几件事，如一个微笑、一场有趣的游戏等。 2、时刻关注孩子的情绪变化，多与孩子交谈，倾听孩子表达不愉快的情绪，使其摆脱消极情绪的困扰。 3、请家长结合生活中的事例使孩子懂得快乐的情绪会“传	社区活动组织幼儿去参观师大附小的哥哥、姐姐做操。《参观师大附小》	1、幼儿对人体运动、动物运动有着浓厚的兴趣（有些孩子对后者甚到达到痴迷的程度）。 2、在探索和尝试中，孩子们可以获得丰富的身体经验和运动经验。他们发现人和动物都会运动，运动可以促进健康；身体运动和控制身体是多么有趣。 3、幼儿对自我
	语言交往活动	故事《比赛》、语言活动：《动物运动会》、儿歌《小蚱蜢》、语言活动：《会说话的手》、故事：《小仙女的云》故事：《大灰狼开心了》	语言活动：《菲菲生气了》、故事：《消气商店》、					
	体育卫生活动	体育游戏：《调皮的球》、手指游戏：《向手挑战》、	体育游戏：《我们都是机器人》体育活动：《快乐的小推车》	布置小医院，提供各种医护玩具				

认识数字6,能初步进数与物的匹配。 5、能有兴趣地用动作、表情表现自己高兴时的样子，并尝试编唱。	数学计算机活动	数学活动：《打扮新年树》	数学游戏：〈送礼物〉	《拼蛋》《看数字别别针》		染”,引导幼儿正确对待不顺心的事,做工一个快乐的孩子。平时能坚持记录并反馈幼儿在家中是如何让大家高高兴兴的。		的认识也逐渐建立起来,他们能从运动中获得满足感、愉快感和成功感。
	艺术表现活动	美工活动：《大青虫》、美术活动：《给图形涂色》、律动：《快跳起来》、美术活动：《我的生气故事》	音乐活动：《伸伸转转》、歌曲：《表情歌》唱歌：《送给我们一岁》	提供各种材料，供幼儿用多种方法设计制作贺卡。				
	自由游戏活动	培养幼儿在自由活动中积累与同伴合作、协调运动的经验。如玩滑滑梯时的配合等。						

元　月　份　计　划 (Planning for January)

目 标	主要教育活动内容参考				环境创设	家长工作	社区活动	观察评估
1、愿意克服困难，做一个勇敢的孩子. 2、通过扮演游戏，体验海派困难会使自己一直处在受苦的景遇,从而萌发克服困难的愿望和勇气. 3、能认读数字 7，复习 7 以内的数序. 4、用动作和小乐器表现下雪时幼儿欢快愉悦的情绪. 5、能细心地沿着线条剪、折,表现雪娃娃的可爱. 6、使幼儿````不怕冷,能勇敢地参加冬季体育活动.		集体活动		区域活动	1、布置 不怕，我勇敢"专栏,幼儿可以自己画出自己在生活中表现勇敢精神的事. 2、幼师共同把活动室布置成冬天的景象,如:窗户上挂冰凌、雪花的剪纸等. 3、布置"勇敢的人"和"不怕冷的人"展览,收集解放军、人们冒着严寒工作的照片等.	1、请家长在家里鼓励孩子自己做一些力所能及的事,如:到黑房子取物、夜里自己上厕所、自己睡觉、双休日一家人去户外游玩或爬山等,有意识地帮助孩子克服害怕心理,勇敢地面对困难. 2、请家长为孩子安排丰富的寒假生活,注意孩子在假期中的安全.	开元旦会	每个幼儿提供一个经历黑暗、战胜胆怯的游戏情境，从而使用幼儿在似真似假的情境中培养勇敢精神。在活动中幼儿会用肢体动作、语言、神态等来表现蜗牛害怕困难，不愿意克服困难，最终只能继续受苦的情景。
		全班	小组					
	科学探索活动	探索活动:《山洞寻宝》、科学活动:《天冷别冻着》	科学活动:《快乐冬令营(一)、(二)》、探索活动:《寒风中的人》	小电珠发光:提供小电珠、电池、电线等。				
	数学活动	数学活动:《勇夺小红旗》	数学活动:《小兔送信》	走迷宫:提供多种迷宫图片。				
	语言交往活动	故事:《咪咪》、语言活动:《小狐狸的枪和炮》、儿歌:《不怕冷的大衣》	语言活动:《蜗牛搬家》	在表演区中提供"打喷嚏的小老鼠"的音乐。				
	体育卫生活动	体育活动:《玩雪球》、体育游戏:《蜗牛受苦》	体育游戏:《冬日远足(一)、(二)》					

	艺术表现活动	音乐活动:《小乌龟上山坡》、美工活动:《勇敢的雪娃娃》	音乐活动:《小雪花》	提供打击乐器，幼儿可以打击《加油干》或其他的乐曲。				
	自由游戏活动	使幼儿愿意克服困难,做一个勇敢的孩子,并且知道做了错事要改正.						